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By May Agnes Fleming.

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- 2.—A WONDERFUL WOMAN.
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- 4.—NORINE'S REVENGE
- 5.—A MAD MARRIAGE.
- 6.—ONE NIGHT'S MYSTERY.
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SILENT AND TRUE

OR,

A LITTLE QUEEN.

A Novel.

BY (early)
MRS MAY AGNES FLEMING,

AUTHOR OF

"GUY EARLSCOURT'S WIFE," "A WONDERFUL WOMAN," "A TERRIBLE
SECRET," "NORINE'S REVENGE," "A MAD MARRIAGE,"
"ONE NIGHT'S MYSTERY," ETC.

"He would have passed a pleasant life of it, in despite of the
devil and all his works, had not his path been crossed by a being
that causes more perplexity to mortal man than ghost, goblin,
or the whole race of witches, and that was—a woman."

WASHINGTON IRVING.



NEW YORK:

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LONDON: S. LOW & CO.

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1878

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TROW'S
PRINTING AND BOOKBINDING COMPANY,
205-213 East 12th St.,
NEW YORK.

BRO

TO
MISS KATIE RUSSELL

THIS OTHER "LITTLE QUEEN"

Is Dedicated.

BROOKLYN,

SEPTEMBER, 1877.

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A LITTLE QUEEN.

CHAPTER I.

PER STEAMER HESPERIA.

IT is a May day. If we did not take our weather on trust and tradition, as we take so many things, we would certainly never find it out for ourselves.

Dropping down on the dock, amid the shivering throng of passengers, from some other planet, let us say, we might easily conclude we had alighted in the middle of March, so gusty, so bleak, so chill is this May morning.

The Cunard steamer will float away down the Mersey in something less than an hour, the little fussy, puffing tender is already waiting for her passengers and luggage, and snorting fiercely, as though in fiery impatience to be off. There is the customary crowd, cabmen haggling over fares, porters shouldering trunks and boxes, passengers hurrying wildly hither and thither, or mounting guard over their belongings, shrill voices of women, deeper tones of men, and now and then, in base growls, some of the strong words in which the nobler sex are wont to relieve their manly minds.

Overhead there is a dark, fast-drifting sky, that bodes anything but a pleasant first night on the ocean, and outside there is an ominous short-chop, and little, wicked white caps

breaking the turbid flow of the river. And all, around, from every quarter of the compass at once, there come sudden bleak blasts that chill to the marrow of your bones, and set you shivering and make you wrap your great coat or waterproof about your shrinking form never so closely.

Standing a little apart, if there be any apart in this maddening crowd, leaning easily against the back of a cab, his hands thrust deep in his pockets, an amused look in his face, is a young man. A solitary large trunk beside him, bearing on its canvas back the big black initials "F. D.," is evidently his only property; a very large and lumbering Newfoundland is evidently his only companion.

He is a tall, strongly-built, square-shouldered young fellow, of perhaps three-and-twenty, his beardless face not in the slightest degree handsome except with the good looks that three-and-twenty years' perfect health, boundless good-humor, and a certain boyish brightness gives. He is sunburned and ruddy, he is buttoned up in a shaggy overcoat, and is taking life at present with a perfect coolness that is refreshing contrasted with the wild excitement depicted on most of the faces around him.

Fragments of flurried conversation reach him on all sides as he stands, but he pays no particular heed to any, until a girl's voice, fresh and clear, but in accents of misery, reaches his ear.

"*Mon Dieu ! Marie !*" cries this despairing voice, in a composite mixture of French and English, "if that imbecile has not carried off my box again. Here, you !" a frantic little stamp ; "drop that directly. It is mine, I tell you. I told you before, *stupide ! Que devons-nous faire, Marie—*"

A soft laugh is the answer. The young man turns round, and see two young ladies and a porter. One of the young ladies is seated quietly on a black box, the other is standing excitedly, trying to prevent the porter from carrying off a similar article of luggage, and trying in vain.

The owner of the dog, with the impetuosity of three-and-twenty, instantly comes to the rescue of beauty in distress.

"Hi! I say you! drop that, will you," he cries, authoritatively, and the porter yields at once to the imperious masculine voice what he has scorned to yield to the frantic feminine. "Don't you want your luggage taken on board the tender?" inquires the young American gentleman, for such his accent proclaims him to be, lifting his hat to the young person who stands, and appears so greatly exercised over the fate of the black box.

"Thanks, monsieur," responds the young lady who has been talking French, in perfect English, but with a musical accent, "this is the second time that stupid man has tried to carry it off whether or no. Oh, yes, we want our luggage to go on board, but the captain, our very good friend, has told us to wait here until he comes."

"I see him coming now," says the second young lady, who has a very sweet voice and much fainter accent than the first. "Look yonder, Petite. Ah! he has stopped to speak to the stout lady, but he is coming for us."

"Small black box, large black box, one portmanteau, a bag, and a bonnet-box," says the first, rapidly and concisely, taking the inventory of her belongings. "Yes, everything is here. Ma foi, how I wish we were on board, and out of this jostling, noisy throng."

"Yes, it is very cold," replies the young lady called Marie, and she draws a large shawl she wears close about her, and shivers in the raw wind.

They are dressed alike, in traveling suits of dark gray tweed, and are apparently sisters. Monsieur "F. D.," resuming his easy position against the back of the cab, looks at them critically, and on the whole approvingly, while they wait for their very good friend, the captain. He can look with perfect ease, for they are not looking at him, have apparently forgotten his proximity and existence. The one addressed

as Marie interests him most, for the good reason that he cannot see her, so thick is the mask of black lace she wears strapped across her hat and face. But the voice is peculiarly sweet, the braided hair under the hat is a lovely gold bronze, and the form is so shapely, so graceful, that even the heavy disguising shawl cannot wholly conceal it. She stands up presently and he sees that she is tall—divinely tall, he says to himself, and no doubt divinely fair. In a general way he approves of tall, fair young women. The other is a little person, about eighteen, perhaps, with a dark olive face, and with no especial claim to beauty, except the claim of two large, brilliant brown eyes. Even if he had not heard her speak, he would have set her down as a French girl—her nationality is patent in her face.

The captain, brown-faced, burly, and genial, makes his way to where they await him, with some difficulty, for friends besiege him on all sides.

"Well, my little ladies," is his greeting, "ready, are you, and waiting? Here, my man!" A porter approaches, and touches his cap. "Bear a hand here, with these bags and boxes, and look sharp. Now, young ladies," here he presents an elbow to the right and left, "I'll take you under my wing, and consign you to the tender mercies of the tender."

It is a mild joke, but he laughs at it, and goes off with his fair freight. The owner of the sweet voice never looked back, but the owner of the pretty dark eyes casts one farewell glance and slight smile backward to the gentleman who came to the rescue of the black box. Mr. "F. D." lifts his hat, sees them vanish, and busies himself, for the first time, about his dog and his trunk.

Presently they are all on board the tender, and puffing down the stream to where, big, and quiet, and powerful, the *Hesperia* awaits her passengers. The number is very large; there is hardly standing room on the little tender's deck. It

is rough, and raw, and cold, and supremely miserable. To make matters worse, a drizzling rain begins to fall, and umbrellas are unfurled, and ladies crouch under such shelter as they can find, and everybody looks blue, and sea-sick by anticipation, and most utterly wretched.

The Newfoundland and his master hoist no umbrellas; they stand and look, on the whole, as if they rather enjoyed the misery of those about them, and were perfectly warm, and cozy and comfortable themselves. The young man looks about him for the dark eyes, and the tall, slight, graceful figure; but the captain has stowed them away somewhere, and he speedily forgets them, and is sufficiently amused by the rest. Then they are on board, and he gets one more glimpse of "my little ladies," as, wing-and-wing with the captain, they go to the cabin. Only a glimpse, for he has his own cabin to look after, and his dog to consign to the proper authorities. And then a gun fires, and there is a parting cheer from the tender, and Liverpool lies behind them and the wide Atlantic before.

Luncheon hour arrives, and as no one has had time to become sea-sick, there is a rush for the long saloon. Among them is the owner of the dog, whose appetite, afloat or ashore, is all that the appetite of hearty, hungry three-and-twenty should be. As he carves his chicken, he glances about for the owner of the veiled face—a pretty face, he has made up his mind—but she is not there. The other is, however, seated near her good friend, the captain, still wearing hat and jacket, and her interest apparently pretty equally divided between the contents of her plate and the men and women around her. She catches the eye of the preserver of her box, and smiles a frank recognition—so frank, indeed, that when they rise, he feels warranted in approaching and addressing her.

"Are you coming on deck?" he asks, rather eagerly. She is not precisely pretty, but she is sufficiently attractive to

make him desire a better acquaintance—the eyes are lovely, and the smile is winning. “You had better,” he urges, “keep on deck as much as you can, if you want to avoid sea-sickness.”

“But it is raining, monsieur,” she says, hesitatingly.

She accepts his advances with the unconventional readiness with which people ignore introductions and talk to one another on shipboard. She has all the ease of manner of one who has traveled a good deal, as Mr. “F. D.” sees, and bears about her unmistakably the stamp of “the world.”

“It has ceased raining; it was nothing but a passing drift. It is quite pleasant on deck now.”

“Not cold nor rough?” she asks, dubiously.

Not at all cold, he assures her; that is to say, no colder than it was on the dock, not so cold even in some sheltered nooks he knows of; and finally mademoiselle takes his arm, and ascends with him to the deck.

“The other young lady is not surely sea-sick so soon?” says this artful young man, for he is curious to see that other young lady, with the silvery voice, and graceful figure, and veiled face.

“No, only getting ready,” she answers, and laughs. “My sister is always sea-sick—the very sight of the sea turns her ill. She will be ill from now until we land. I am sorry for her, you understand, but I have to laugh. Now I am sea-sick scarcely at all. I have crossed the Channel many times, and unless it is very, very rough, I am not ill a moment. But for Marie—ah! she is fit to die before she reaches Calais.”

From this artless speech, the artful young gentleman learns many things. First, that Marie is my sister—well, he had surmised that much; that the “little ladies” are certainly French; that they had crossed the Channel many times; that this one may be his *compagnon de voyage* to New York;

but that it is more than doubtful if the other appears at all. This is so disappointing that he hazards a question.

"I am really very sorry for your sister. Surely she will not be obliged to keep her cabin *all* the way across."

"All the way, monsieur," answers the owner of the dark eyes, with a pretty French gesture of eyebrows and shoulders. "She will just lie in her berth, and grow whiter and whiter every day, and read a great deal, and munch dry biscuits, and sleep when she is neither reading nor munching, until we land at New York. Do you belong in New York, monsieur?"

"Not exactly, mademoiselle. I belong down South, but I have seen a good deal of New York off and on. If you will permit me"—he produces a card with a bow, and a slight boyish blush. The dark eyes rest upon it and read "Francis Dexter." Before she can make any acknowledgment, or return, as he hopes, the confidence, the captain suddenly approaches, and reads the pasteboard over her shoulder.

"Well, my little lady," he says in his jovial voice, "how goes the *mal-de-mer*? None yet? That's a good girl. Mr. Dexter, good-afternoon to you, sir. I saw you on the deck a while ago, but hadn't time to speak. My little friend, Mademoiselle Reine, Mr. Dexter, going to New York in my care. If you can help to amuse her on the passage, I shall take it as a personal favor. How is Mademoiselle Marie? Not sick, surely? Oh! I am sorry to hear that. I'll call upon her presently, when I get time."

The captain bustled away.

Mademoiselle's dark eyes regard her companion.

"You know the captain?" she inquires.

"Oh, very well; crossed with him when I came over—an out-and-out good fellow, one's beau-ideal of a jolly sailor. It is more than a year since we met, but he seems to have a good memory for faces. I didn't suppose he would remember me."

"You have been traveling a whole year?" she asks. "All Americans travel, do they not? They all go to Paris once at least in their life, I am told."

"Or if not in their life, they go if they are good when they die," responds young Dexter, laughing. "Paris is a particularly jolly paradise, alive or dead. I spent two months there, and could hardly tear myself away to do Brussels, and Vienna, and all the rest of 'em. I think I have gone over the beaten track of travel pretty well in my year, although a man could spend half a dozen years very comfortably knocking about Europe, and not exhaust the sights. But with the year my leave of absence expires, and I am obliged to return."

"Ah! monsieur is in the army——"

"Not at all. Leave from the powers at home, I mean. My uncle—I am his property, made over to him absolutely—orders me about at will. 'Take a run over to Europe, my boy,' he says to me; 'only don't make it over a year. You can see sights enough, and spend money enough in that time, and if it takes away a little of that puppyish self-conceit I see you are developing so fast, it will neither be time nor money wasted.' Such is the frank and ingenuous style of my uncle." So I packed my valise, and came, and now the year is up, and I am returning."

He tells this with an off-hand cheeriness that is a part of his character; and, by the way, what a good gift a frank, cheery voice is! He is prepared to give mademoiselle his whole biography, since he first went into roundabouts, if she cares to listen, but she does not seem to care. She smiles, and is silent for a while; then she asks suddenly: "Monsieur, have you seen Rouen?"

"The Manchester of France, as they call it—place with the grand cathedral, and Louis de Breze's wonderful statue, and Diane de Poitiers kneeling on the tomb, and where Joan of Arc made a noise in the world, and Corneille and

Fontenelle were born, and where there is *Notre Dame de Bon Secours*, beautiful as a vision," he says, with voluble disconnectedness. "Oh, yes, mademoiselle, I have seen Rouen."

Her face lights, her eyes shine, her lips pout eagerly. She is about to speak—then suddenly some thought checks the words upon her lips, the light fades out of her face, and she leans over and looks silently at the dark flowing water.

"You know Rouen, mademoiselle?" Dexter asserts, his folded arms on the bulwarks, his eyes on her face.

"I know it well, monsieur, better than well. I was born in Rouen."

She stops abruptly, recollecting, perhaps, that this cheery, boyish, bright young fellow is a total stranger. Indeed, most people are apt to forget that fact, after ten minutes of Mr. Dexter's society. He sees a shadow fall on her face, he hears a faint sigh, or fancies he does, but the brown eyes do not lift from the white-capped and angry-looking little waves.

"Ah! awfully jolly place to be born in, I should say," is what Mr. Dexter remarks sympathetically; "so old, and historical, and all that. Makes one rub up one's knowledge of French history and Agnes Sorel, and Diane de Poitiers, and 'La Pucelle d'Orléans,' as they call her there, and all the other lovely ladies who had their day and made themselves immortal in that old town 'across the hills of Normandy.' Now, I was born in Boston, and anything more unromantic than Boston the mind of man has never conceived."

"But generations yet unborn will proudly point it out as the birthplace of Frank Dexter. My dear boy, turn round, and let me see if those dulcet tones really belong to you."

The voice that says this is a woman's, and Mr. Dexter and Mademoiselle Reine, turning round simultaneously, see the speaker. They see a lady whose best friend cannot call her young, whose worst enemy dare not stigmatize her as old. A lady who has rounded the Rubicon—thirty-five—and gone a

step or two down hill towards forty, tall, commanding, of fine presence and fine face, dark and well tanned, and lit up by a pair of brilliant dark gray eyes.

"Miss Hariott for a ducat!" cries Dexter, almost before he has seen her, and then he has seized her hand and is shaking it with an energy that people of his type invariably throw into that performance. "I knew you were abroad, and used to search the hotel registers in every place I came to for your name."

"I don't believe you ever thought of me once, from the moment we parted until the present," skeptically retorts the lady.

"Oh! upon my word I did; kept a lookout for you everywhere, on the top of Mont Blanc, and in the Hospice of the Great St. Bernard included. But you never turned up, I need hardly say. Better late than never, though. Delightful surprise to meet you here. How was it I didn't see you on the dock this forenoon?"

"Because you were better employed gazing elsewhere, I suppose. But, my dear boy, you are really looking very brown, and nice, and healthy, and good-natured. It is quite a pleasure to see you looking so well."

"My dear Miss Hariott, do I ever look anything else?"

"I had a letter from Laurence last month," goes on the lady; "he was asking for you—saying you ought to be returning about this time, and that if I met you he hoped I would take care of you and fetch you home."

"Ah!" Dexter says, laughing, "Longworth is an old lover of yours, I know. I've a good mind, since he so kindly committed me to your charge, to let you take care of me as far as Baymouth. I should like to see the dear old boy again."

"Do," says Miss Hariott; "there need be no hurry going down South, and Baymouth will be looking its loveliest by

the time we get there. I think, on the whole, I prefer it to Italy."

"Rank blasphemy to say so. Miss Hariott, let me make you acquainted with—Mademoiselle Reine."

An older man, a wiser man (which Frank Dexter is not), a man of the world (which Frank Dexter never will be), might have thought twice before introducing two ladies in this free and easy way, without the consent of either, and in profound ignorance of the name of one. But if Frank Dexter were that older, wiser, more polished man, he would not be the well-liked young fellow that he is.

The little Norman girl, whose dark eyes are the chief charm of her olive face, looks up and smiles. Miss Hariott looks down with that kind and half wistful glance young Dexter has seen often in her eyes, when they look on fair and youthful faces.

"Thank you, Frank," she says. "I was wishing you would. Now, like a good boy, if you will run for a chair—not a camp-stool, I beg. I weigh one hundred and fifty-seven pounds, Mademoiselle Reine, and tremble whenever I intrust myself to one— Ah! thank you, my dear," to Frank returning with a substantial arm-chair. "Now we can talk and be comfortable—as comfortable, at least, as it is ever possible for sane human beings to be in a ship. Praise the sea, but keep on land—no truer axiom than that anywhere, my dear Frank."

"Sorry I can't agree with you, Miss Hariott. 'A wet sheet, and a flowing sea, and a wind that follows fast,' is about my idea of perfect earthly felicity. Do you know what I mean to do in Baymouth?"

"Nothing good, I am perfectly sure; the particular sort of evil I am unable to specify. You said to see Laurence Longworth."

"Well, partly that, and to enjoy your society, of course" (Miss Hariott looks severe); "but my chief object is to have

a yacht built. They know how to do that sort of thing in your little New England town, and it is about all they do know, except to make pumpkin pies——”

“Pumpkin pie is the national dish of my country. I have eaten nothing to equal it on the whole continent of Europe. Speak of your nation's institutions with respect, young man, or forever hold your peace.”

“Well,” goes on Dexter, “I mean to build that yacht. I wish I might name it after you, Miss Hariott, but we will settle that later, and I shall spend (D. V.) the next five years of my life cruising about between Boston Bay and the Gulf of Florida. I'll take you and Larry every time you both like to come, for I know it would be cruel to part you. You ought to be a pretty good sailor by this time, I should think. And, if Ma'amselle Reine is anywhere within a hundred miles, we will be more than happy to call for and take her too.”

Mlle. Reine has been sitting all this time watching the rough, dark water, tossing so restlessly all around them. But she has been listening also. Since the word Baymouth was spoken, a quick interest has awakened in her quiet face, and she has sat attentive to every word. But if Dexter, artful once more, wished by this well directed hint to discover her destination, he does not discover it. Mademoiselle laughs and answers too, with perfect seeming frankness.

“I am a tolerable sailor as girls go,” she says, “but I share Miss Hariott's aversion for the sea, and I don't think I should fancy yachting. Are we going to have a rough night, monsieur? A prospective sea-captain ought to be weather-wise.”

“Well—a leetle dirty weather,” replies Mr. Dexter, casting his eye in a skipperish manner to windward; “merely a little. Nothing to signify—nothing to be afraid of.”

“Who's afraid?” retorts Miss Hariott, indignantly. “A little travel is a dangerous thing for a boy of your age, Master Franky. I never liked precocious children, and if I had

been near that uncle of yours when he proposed the trip, I should have strongly recommended him to keep you in the nursery a few years longer. Not that I think the old gentleman should be spoken to as a rational being, for what sane man would ever have disinherited Laurence Longworth for a silly boy like you."

"Now, my dear Miss Hariott," says the young man, rather uneasily, "don't get on that exciting topic, I entreat. It always carries you away. And it wasn't my fault. If Larry chose to be a fool——"

"There! change the subject," exclaims Miss Hariott, rubbing her nose in a vexed way. "As you say, it's a thing that upsets me, and also, as you say, it is not your fault. Mademoiselle, is this your first trip across the Atlantic?"

"Yes, it is mademoiselle's first ocean voyage; but she has crossed the Channel six times, and that is a tolerable test of sea-going qualities."

"You are French, my dear," pursues the elder lady. "I knew it before I came up and spoke to Frank. You have a thoroughly French face. But how perfectly you speak English, with scarcely even an accent."

Mlle. Reine smiles again. That dusk, French face, which one would hesitate before pronouncing even pretty, lights vividly whenever she smiles, and the smile is in the bronze brown eyes before it reaches the lips. Miss Hariott, no mean judge of faces, a shrewd and keen observer of the men and women she meets, but withal one of the most tender-hearted and impulsive maiden ladies on earth, falls in love with her on the spot.

"Mademoiselle was born in Rouen," says young Dexter, who is a talker or nothing. "You went to Rouen, Miss Hariott, didn't you, and went out of your senses as I did over Notre Dame de Bon Secours, and said your prayers before one of those lovely *chairs* every day, as I didn't. I wish I had been born in Rouen, or Versailles, or Verona, or

Venice, or any of those old romantic, historical places, where I feel a man of my caliber ought to have been born."

"Frank, my dear," says Miss Hariott, resignedly, "what a dreadful deal of nonsense you talk. I was asking mademoiselle how she comes to speak English so perfectly. Please don't say anything for the next five minutes if you can help, and give your fellow-creatures a chance."

The rebuke in no way disconcerts Mr. Dexter, and the soft eyes of the little mademoiselle look up at him with that pleasant smile, as if she found his honest boyish face good to look at. But she addresses the lady.

"I was born in Rouen, and have lived there nearly all my life; but I knew many English there"—she hesitates a second and the smile dies quite away—"my mother was American."

"American!" repeats Miss Hariott, delightedly. "Ah! that accounts. Why, my dear, you are almost a compatriot."

"Almost is a wide word. I am nothing at all of an American. Will I offend you very much if I say I like neither America or Americans?"

Frank reddens. For a moment Miss Hariott does look inclined to be offended. There is a little embarrassing pause.

"But, my dear, your mother——"

"My mother is dead."

"I beg your pardon. I was only about to say how was it possible for you to dislike your mother's people! Have you known so many disagreeable Americans?"

"I never knew any."

"Then how is it possible for you to judge whether you like them or not? Perhaps you read the books English literary people—Sala, Dickens, Mrs. Trollope—have written to make money and caricature us?"

"Yes. That is, I have read Dickens; but it is not that. I cannot tell you what it is—a Doctor Fell sort of dislike, perhaps. All I know is that it is there."

"A very poor compliment to her late mother," thinks Miss Hariott. "Well, my dear," she says aloud, with perfect good humor, "we must try and dispel that illusion when we get you among us. We and the French have always been good friends. We adore to this day the memory of Lafayette. He was, I remember, my very first love."

"As Longworth is your last," says Mr. Dexter. Please, may I speak now, Miss Hariott? The five minutes are surely up."

"If you can talk Ma'amselle Reine out of her aversion to you and your countrymen, Frank, use your tongue, by all means."

"I have no aversion to Monsieur Frank," says mademoiselle, and says it so unexpectedly and so coolly that Frank blushes with pleasure, and Miss Hariott laughs outright.

"Then it is collectively, not individually, that you dislike us," she says. "I am glad of that, for general aversions are more easily overcome than particular. I am glad, too, you are about to visit us; that shows a generous wish on your part to know us before you absolutely condemn."

Mademoiselle looks up suddenly and curiously into the elder lady's face.

"Because I wish it," she repeats. "Do you suppose, then madame, I am going because I desire to go—going of my own free will?"

Once again the girl's words are so unexpected that they quite put good Miss Hariott out all the more because a reply is evidently expected.

"Well, mademoiselle, I certainly supposed that in visiting us——"

"I am not going on a visit. I am going to stay."

"Oh!" says Miss Hariott, and for a moment it is all she can say.

There is at once an outspoken abruptness and a reserve

about this young person that puzzles her. She sits and looks at her.

Mademoiselle has resumed her former listless attitude, and is gazing at the fast-flowing water.

"A young woman a little out of the common," she thinks. "Girls, as a rule, are as much alike as dolls cast in a mold—this one with black hair and black eyes, that one with fair hair and blue eyes, the inside of the pretty heads all the same pattern. But I fancy this small demoiselle thinks for herself."

"It is growing very cold," says the young lady, rising abruptly, "and my sister is ill; I must go to her. No, monsieur, not at all"—as Frank eagerly offers an arm. "I will do very well alone. Good-by for to-day, Miss Hariott. I shall have the pleasure, I hope, of meeting you to-morrow."

"We will meet, and disagree, every day we are on board, my dear," responds Miss Hariott, cordially. And then she sits and watches the slight, shapely figure, quick, light, and easy in every movement, out of sight.

"Well, Miss Hariott," says Dexter, taking the deserted stool, "and what do you think of her? I have heard—Longworth said it, of course—that your judgment is infallible."

"Is she pretty, Frank?" is the lady's response. "You are a boy, and ought to know."

"A boy! I was three-and-twenty last birthday. I am five feet eleven and a half inches high. I weigh one hundred and sixty pounds. I have been in love with three distinct ballet-girls, and one Alpine maid last summer. What have I done to be stigmatized thus?"

"If you were as tall as Blunderbore, the Welsh giant, if your locks were as silvery as John Anderson's 'pow,' and if you had been in love with all the ballet-girls in the Black Crook, you would still be nothing but a 'big boy,'" retorts

Miss Hariott. "Answer my question—is mademoiselle pretty?"

"Well, no—except when she smiles, and then she is almost—

"Brown eyes, and pale, pale face—

A wondrous face, that never beauty had,
And yet is beautiful."

That describes her. There's a sort of fascination about her—don't you think? A fellow might easily fall in love with a girl like that."

"A fellow of the Frank Dexter sort might easily fall in love with his grandmother, if the law did not forbid it and nothing else in petticoats was near. I wonder you had not made an idiot of yourself long ago, and married one of your ballet-girls."

"So do I. It is not my fault, though. I asked one of them, and she wouldn't have me."

"Nonsense."

"No, it is a fact. She danced in Niblo's, and it was three winters ago. I was madly in love, I assure you."

Here Frank, catching sight of Miss Hariott's disgusted face, explodes into a great laugh.

"Frank, this is awful nonsense——"

"It is gospel truth, Miss Hariott. She fluctuated between me and the fellow who blew the clarinet in the orchestra, for five whole days and nights, and finally threw me over for the clarinet. I was in despair for twenty-four hours; then I went to see 'Faust' at the Opera-House on Eighth avenue, fell in love with Montaland, and one passion cured the other."

"You are a dreadful fool, Frank. Are you going to fall in love with this little mademoiselle?"

"If she will permit me. I don't think I can amuse myself more innocently on the passage home."

"What is her name?"

"Mademoiselle Reine."

"What is her other name?"

"My little ladies, I heard the captain call her and her sister that."

"Oh, there is a sister. What is she like?"

"A pretty girl, if one could see her, I am certain. I didn't. She wore a veil which she never put up. They seem to be quite alone, and traveling in the captain's charge. I have a conviction she will be the one I shall honor with my preference, if she appears."

"If she is anything like the one who has appeared, it will be labor lost. There are plenty of brains in that little dark head, and the girl who marries you, Frank, will of necessity be a simpleton of the first water."

Mr. Dexter removes his hat and bows to this compliment. Then Miss Hariott, who, like most plump people, is of a chilly habit, gets up, takes his arm, staggers below, and is seen no more. Young Dexter goes to the smoking-room, fraternizes with every one he meets, and forgets all about the pretty smile, the deep soft eyes, and that other veiled face.

The owner of the veiled face—the veil removed now—lifts her head from her pillow as her sister enters, and speaks wearily.

"At last, Petite——"

"Marie!"

"Well, Petite!"

"I have been on deck," says Mademoiselle Reine, suppressed excitement in her voice. "I met again the gentleman who spoke to us on the dock—you remember?"

"I remember. Well?"

"He addressed me again and we began to talk. Then a lady came up and spoke to him, an old friend, and they talked of—Marie, they talked of Baymouth."

But Marie is not excited, though Reine is. She lifts her eyebrows and says, calmly:

"Et puis?"

"And then—how is it that nothing excites you, Marie? It startled me, I can tell you. To speak of that place, and before me, and so soon."

"An odd coincidence, I admit. Did they speak of——"

"Not a word," says Reine quickly; "they mentioned but one name—Laurence Longworth. But who is to tell what I may not hear before the journey ends."

"What, indeed," says the other, falling back on her pillow, "as if it could do any good. Reine, I would rather hear nothing—not one word—and go to my fate blindfold. If I were going to have a limb cut off, I would rather the surgeon told me nothing about when or how, but just put me into an ether sleep and amputate it without my knowledge. When we know what we are going to suffer, we suffer twice over, in anticipation and in reality. And I think the first is the worse."

"Marie, I wish we had never come." I have a feeling, a presentiment, that nothing but humiliation and misery will come of it."

"I don't believe in presentiments, and it was wise to come. Madame, *notre grand'mère*, may be a dragon, but in the old fairy-tales even the dragons were conquered by courage. I feel as though we were the heroines of a fairy-tale, on our way to an enchanted castle, never knowing what the guardian monster is like, but determined to charm it, and come off victorious all the same."

"And the Prince Charming, *chérie*, are we to find him there too?" asks Reine, smiling as she stoops to kiss her sister; "every fairy-tale ends with the marriage of princess and prince."

The face on the pillow clouds suddenly—Marie turns away from the caress with a restless, impatient sigh.

"Don't let us talk, Petite," she says, wearily; "it is very rough, and I am half sick."

An hour after darkness lies over the stormy and lonely sea. Lights are flashing in every cabin, the saloon is brave with many lamps, much music, and cheerful conversation. Hours pass, and presently it is bedtime, and music ceases, and good-nights are said, and lamps go out, and the first evening on board ship is over. People clamber into berths, and fall asleep to the lullaby of the rocking waves. Miss Hariott has had what she dearly likes—a bright, social evening, and goes to bed in high good humor. Frank Dexter retires to his, chanting cheerfully a piratical refrain, which informs all whom it may concern that

“Oh, he is a pirate bold,
The scourge of the wide, wide sea,
With a murd’rous thirst for gold,
And a life that is wild and free,”

and breaks off to order Tom, the steward, to be sure and fetch him a tub of the Atlantic at sharp six to-morrow morning for his bath, and tumbles up to his roost, and is asleep almost before his brown curly head is fairly on the pillow. •

Up in her berth the little mademoiselle reclines, gazing out with darkly solemn eyes at that restless, complaining, tossing ocean, which stretches everywhere, black and heaving, and melts away at last into the storm-driven sky. Below, Marie sleeps, her fair head pillowed on one perfect arm ; but Reine cannot sleep this first night, and so lies thinking. Somber thoughts surely, with those deep, melancholy eyes fixed on the dark and lonesome sea.

CHAPTER II.

LOST IN PORT.



MR. DEXTER'S prediction about dirty weather is verified—it is extremely dirty for the next three days. There is a head-wind, a leaden sky, and off and on a fine drizzling rain. The stout ship plunges and plows through it all, and as a rule everybody is at death's door with sea-sickness. A few gentlemen still show at dinner and on deck, and conspicuous among these gentlemen is Frank Dexter, who "comes out strong," in the words of Mark Tapley, and is as "jolly" as even Mark could be in the same place. He never misses a meal, he spends his evenings in the smoking-room, where his great haw-haw leads the laugh; he makes friendly calls upon his big dog, and also upon Miss Hariott; he takes vigorous exercise for hours together on deck, buttoned up to the eyes in his rough coat, his ruddy face ashine in the slanting wind and rain. Miss Hariott is dismally sick, so the captain informs him are also "my little ladies;" but in their absence Mr. Frank is consoled by another ministering angel, upon whom neither head-winds nor dirty weather have the least effect.

This is a Mrs. Scarlett, a *passé* pretty blonde, a coquette of the purest water, and who, having discovered that young Dexter is enormously rich, or the heir of an enormously rich uncle, which is the same, singles him out at once for distinction. For, although Mr. Scarlett exists, and partakes with unexceptional relish of three meals and high tea daily, and Mr. Dexter's wealth can ultimately benefit in no way Mrs. Scarlett, still it is quite in feminine human nature to prefer

the golden youth for one's favors, and Frank, as has been said, rises to the distinction of pretty Mrs. Scarlett's cavalier servant. In a ravishing suit of navy blue, fitting like a glove the roundest, trimmest shape in the world, a sailor-hat crushed down over the fluffy copper-gold hair, a little gauzy gray veil over the smiling, dimpling face, Mrs. Scarlett hangs daily, for hours at a stretch, upon his arm in that quick march up and down; by Mrs. Scarlett's side he sits, at dinner, by Mrs. Scarlett's side he stands all evening while she plays "pieces" and sings pathetic little songs about standing on bridges at midnight when the clocks are striking the hour and imploring, in a wailing minor strain, the sea to break, break, break at the foot of its crags, in a heart-breaking little way that makes the listener feel, without any previous data to go upon, that Mr. Scarlett must be a brute, and Mrs. Scarlett must have been forced to give him her hand while her heart was another's. Frank falls in love; to fall in love is Frank's normal condition, and whether the lady be married or single, old or young (and Mrs. Scarlett might easily have been younger), does not for the time being signify in the least. He forgets Miss Hariott and Mademoiselle Reine, until, on the morning of the fourth day, going on deck after breakfast, he finds winds and waves propitious, the sun trying to break out from behind sulky clouds, and a little gray figure that he knows leaning in the old position over the side and watching the water. Before he can advance, a neatly-gloved hand is pushed through his arm, and Mrs. Scarlett claims her own.

"Naughty boy! I have been on deck this half-hour, looking for you everywhere. Where have you been? Look there—it is actually the sun at last. Come for our walk. No one has my step like you, Frank."

For after three days' acquaintance Mrs. Scarlett calls her victim Frank.

"What! not Scarlett?" says Frank, in that cheery voice

of his—a thoroughly heart-whole voice, whatever its owner may think.

"Scarlett!" repeats Mrs. Scarlett, with ineffable scorn. Then she sighs, and saddens, and is silent, and the sigh, and the sadness, and the silence are meant to say: "Why speak of *him*? Why not let me forget if I can, in congenial companionship, the galling chain that binds a sensitive heart to one cold and coarse?"

Frank is touched.

"Poor little woman," he thinks. "Scarlett is a beast. If I were in his place——"

And then he looks down into the pensive face, and sighs in sympathy, and starts her off at a brisk canter.

They pass Mademoiselle Reine; she sees them, but she does not look up. Miss Hariott sees them too, when a little later she reels on deck and totters to mademoiselle's side, and she nods curtly to young Dexter, and looks his fair friend through with her keen woman's eyes.

Mademoiselle greets her with a smile, and the two fall into talk at once, and compare notes about their three days' woe. They drift off to other things, and Miss Hariott finds that Mlle. Reine can converse fluently and well. Her descriptions and anecdotes of life in Rouen are wonderfully interesting. She narrates simply and unaffectedly, and grows vividly dramatic sometimes. They sit until the luncheon bell summons them below, and the elder lady has thoroughly enjoyed her *tête-à-tête*.

Neither Mr. Dexter nor Mrs. Scarlett sit at their table, but they are still together, with Mr. Scarlett, a stout, sensible, good-humored, middle-aged gentleman, on the other side of his wife, paying much more attention to the eatables than to his lady's flirtation.

Luncheon over, mademoiselle disappears for a time, and Frank presently frees himself from his fair enslaver, and finds himself at Miss Hariott's side.

"So sorry to hear you have been sea-sick, Miss Hariott. Nobody can tell how much I have missed you."

Miss Hariott regards him with a scornful eye.

"Ah, nobody, I am quite sure. You have been dreadfully sorry, no doubt—you look it. Who is that woman?"

"What woman, my dear Miss Hariott?"

"Now don't begin by being an imbecile at the very opening of this conversation. That woman you have been prancing up and down the deck all this forenoon?"

"Prancing! That any one should call Mrs. Scarlett's graceful, gliding gait prancing. That is the lady who has kept me from utter desolation during your illness of the past three days. She is the prettiest lady on board."

"Ah!" says Miss Hariott, with skeptical scorn.

"Surely you think so. Did you ever see a more perfect complexion?"

"Rice-powder," curtly responds the lady.

"But that lovely color——"

"*Rouge végétal.*"

"And such a superb head of hair——"

"Bought it in Paris, my precious boy."

"Such an exquisite tint, too——"

"Golden Fluid, Frank."

"Well, but the figure," remonstrated Dexter, trying to look indignant, but immensely tickled; "that, at least, you cannot deny is genuine, and——"

"Cotton and corsets," says Miss Hariott, trenchantly.

"Don't tell me. I know nature when I see it, and I know art. If she wants to parade this ship and exhibit herself, why doesn't she get her lawful owner to parade her? She is married, isn't she?"

"Alas! yes. As for the husband, he is what all husbands are, an insensible brute. He smokes and reads all day, he smokes and plays cards all evening, and, I believe, smokes

and sleeps all night. Is it not sad to see an angel like that thrown away on such a stolid animal?"

Miss Hariott, in angry disgust, looks to see if he is in earnest, and the look is too much for Frank. That school-boy laugh of his breaks forth, and makes all who are within hearing smile from very sympathy.

"What is the joke?" says a voice behind. "May I come and laugh too? I like to laugh."

"Yes, my dear, come. It is nothing in the least amusing; but silly boys are always ready to laugh at their own folly. No, don't leave us, Frank——"

"I am not going to leave you, if you will let me stay. I am only going to get mademoiselle a chair."

For it is mademoiselle, with that smile on her dark face and in her deep eyes, that makes Miss Hariott think her something more than pretty.

"How is your sister?" she says.

"Still miserably ill. Marie is the very worst sailor in the world. She will be ill until we get to New York."

"Even if the weather is fine?"

"Even if it is fine. But if she were well, she still would not come on deck?"

"Why not?"

Mademoiselle looked at her with a half laugh.

"My sister is very fair, and the sea-wind and sun spoil her skin. It is fine and fair as an infant's, and will not bear the least exposure."

"Your sister is a vain little goose," thinks Miss Hariott. "Blonde girls are always insipid, and I have known a few. And you, my little lady, are fond of your sister, and proud of her beauty, and it is the first weak spot I have discovered in you yet."

Miss Hariott is not malicious in spite of her startlingly candid criticism, but she conscientiously sets herself to work to discover a few more. But this demure Norman girl baffles

even her penetration. Weaknesses she may have in plenty, but at least they do not lie on the surface.

"Your sister is younger than you, of course?" she remarks, and mademoiselle looks at her as if surprised.

"Younger? No, she is two years older. Marie is twenty, I am eighteen."

The mingled candor and reserve of the girl puzzle the elder lady. Young persons of eighteen are not generally averse to telling their age, but these admissions lead one to look for others, and the others do not come. All Miss Hariott, who has a full share of woman's curiosity, can make out before they part that evening, is that mademoiselle has lived most of her life in Rouen with a paternal aunt, that she has visited Italy, that for the past year or more she has resided in London, that she speaks German and a little Italian, and that she does not know, and never has known a single creature in all America. Then why is she going there? As a teacher? Hardly; an indefinable something about her says she has a definite home and purpose in view, and that she does not propose to earn her own living.

"Will you not come into the saloon, my dear," Miss Hariott says, as darkness falls over the sea, and they go below; "we are to have an amateur concert."

"Yes," responds mademoiselle, with a *mon* of disdain that is thoroughly French, "a concert of cats. We heard you last night, and shut the door to keep it out."

"That must have been when Frank was singing," responds Miss Hariott. "Did you hear Frank? When he is very much excited he sings the most and the worst of any one alive. It was rather trying, even to nerves not too musical, to hear him and Mrs. Scarlett doing a duo, she shrieking soprano, he booming bass. But if you will come in to-night, I promise to try and keep him quiet. I know by your face you can sing."

"Yes, I can sing," says Mlle. Reine. She pauses with

her hand on the handle of her door, and looks at both with a bright smile. "I won't sing for you in this ship," she says, "but I will promise you this. I will sing for you one day, as often and as long as you like. *A demain*—good-night."

She disappears. Miss Hariott looks blankly at Dexter.

"What does she mean?" she asks.

Frank shrugs his shoulders.

"Who knows? Don't ask me. Let us only hope so charming a promise may be fulfilled. Perhaps she too is *en route* for Baymouth."

He says it with an incredulous laugh; but a thoughtful shadow comes slowly over Miss Hariott's face. It remains there all evening as she sits and knits something with two long needles, and a lap full of rose-colored and white wools, and not even Frank's comic songs can dispel it. It is still there when she goes to bed.

"It would be curious," she says, as she knots up all her glossy, abundant dark hair for the night, "it would be *very* curious, and yet it might be."

Whatever her suspicion is, she tries next day, and tries in vain to discover if it be correct. She asks no direct, not even indirect questions, but the shadow of a smile dawns in mademoiselle's dark eyes. She sees her drift, and evades her skill so artfully that Miss Hariott is almost vexed. It is a fine, sunny day, and they spend it chiefly on deck, and, despite her clever reticence, Miss Hariott's liking hourly increases for Mademoiselle Reine. There is a ring of the true metal about her; she has been brought up on strictly French principles, the elder lady discovers, and she approves of that sort of training in spite of its tendency to make young women "dolly."

Frank Dexter stays with them as much as Mrs. Scarlett will let him, for it is one of the cheerful principles of this young gentleman's life to be off with the old love and on

with the new as rapidly and as frequently as possible. That mademoiselle likes his society is evident ; that she cares for the society of no other man on board is also evident ; and Dexter, hugely flattered, surrenders Mrs. Scarlett entirely before the voyage ends, and lies all day long like a true knight on a railway rug at his liege lady's feet.

The morning of the very last day dawns ; before noon they will be in New York. All is bustle and expectation on board, gladness beams on every face—on every face except that of Mlle. Reine. She during the last three days has grown grave, and very thoughtful, and silent.

"My solemn little lady," says Miss Hariott—it is the captain's invariable name for his charge, and she has adopted it—"how pale and somber you sit. Are you not glad it is to be our last night on board ?"

"No, madame ; I am sorry."

"Sorry, dear child ?"

"I am going to begin a new life, in a new land, among new people—friends or foes, I know not which yet. The old life—ah, such a good life, madame !—lies behind forever ; I can never go back to it. And between that old life of yesterday and the new one of to-morrow, this voyage has been a connecting link, a respite, a breathing-space. Now it is ended, and I must get up and begin all over again, and I am sorry. I am more than sorry—I am afraid."

"Afraid ?"

"I am going to a home I know nothing of, to a person I have never seen. I do not know whether I am welcome or an intruder. I do not know whether I shall be kept or sent away. It is the same with my sister. Have we not reason to be afraid ?"

"Is she afraid, too ?"

"Marie is not like me ; she is braver, wiser ; she is older, and has seen more of people and of the world. No ; my sister is not afraid. Perhaps I have no reason to be ; but I

with this voyage would go on, and on, and on. It has been pleasant, and pleasant things end so soon. If to-day is good, why should we ever wish for to-morrow?"

Frank Dexter is approaching. Before he comes, Miss Hariott takes both the girl's hands, and looks earnestly into the brown sweet eyes.

"Tell me this," she says. "I suspect something. Shall we ever meet again?"

Mademoiselle smiles, a mischievous light chasing the gravity from her face.

"I think so, madame."

"Then remember this, my dear little mademoiselle: if ever you are in trouble, come to me. I have always wanted to be fairy godmother to somebody," says Miss Hariott, with a touch of her usual whimsical humor; "let it be to you. If you ever want a friend, let me be that friend; if you ever need a home, come to mine. I fell in love with your bonnie brown eyes the first moment they looked at me; I am more in love to-night than ever. Promise me—here is Frank—promise me, my little lady."

"I promise," says Mademoiselle Reine, and there are tears in the "bonnie brown eyes." She leans forward with a quick, graceful, gesture, and touches her lips to Miss Hariott's tanned cheek, then turns and moves rapidly away, just as Mr. Dexter saunters up.

"What did she run away for?" demands Frank, in an injured tone.

"Who would not run when they see you coming, if they could?" retorts Miss Hariott. "I cannot. I can't even walk decently in this rolling steamer. Here—give me your arm, and help me to my state-room. It is all the arm will ever be good for."

"Couldn't be devoted to a nobler use. I say, Miss Hariott, have you found out where mademoiselle is going?"

"And do you suppose I would tell you if I had? I leave

impertinent questions to Frank Dexter. Now go away and sing yourself hoarse with that little purring passy-cat, Mrs. Scarlett."

"Thank you, I will," says Frank, and goes.

But when to-morrow, the last day, comes, he is inwardly determined to discover the destination of the nameless and mysterious little ladies. The invisible Marie appears on deck, tall, slender, graceful, but again—veiled. She is introduced to Miss Hariott by her sister, and bows and murmurs a few languid, gracious words. Frank is not presented. Mademoiselle Reine seems rather to wish to avoid him, and what this young lady wishes it is evident she can accomplish, for he hardly finds an opportunity of saying six words to her all day.

They reach the pier. To describe the scene that ensues is impossible—the wild rush and excitement, the noise of many voices, the scramble after baggage, the meeting of friends, the going ashore, the finding of hacks. Frank has to see after his own and Miss Hariott's belongings, to find a hackney-carriage for that lady, and see her safely off.

The "little ladies" at the beginning of the *mêlée* have been conveyed for safe keeping to the captain's room. But when, having seen Miss Hariott safely away, Dexter returns, flushed and hot and eager, he instantly makes for the captain.

"Good-by, captain," he says, extending his hand, and looking everywhere; "I am about the last, am I not? Where are your little ladies?"

"Gone, Mr. Frank."

"Gone! Gone where?"

"Can't tell you that. A friend came for them—a gentleman, a very fine-looking young fellow," says the captain, malice prepossessed in his eye, "and they went away with him. We have had a rattling run, haven't we? Awfully sorry to lose them; charming little ladies, both. Mr. Frank, sir, good-by to you."

CHAPTER III.

LONGWORTH OF THE PHENIX.



AR away from the bustle and uproar of the New York piers, sunny and sleepy this May day, the town of Baymouth lies baking in the heat of mid-afternoon. It is very warm ; windows stand wide, men wear linen coats and straw hats pulled far over their eyes, ladies wield fans as they go shopping, and in the office of the *Baymouth Phenix*, every man of them, from Longworth, proprietor and editor-in-chief, to the youngest and inkiest devil, is in his shirt-sleeves, and uncomfortable at that.

Baymouth is in Massachusetts. Having premised that geographical fact, it is unnecessary to add that Baymouth is a town of enterprise, intelligence, industry, and every cardinal virtue. Baymouth is a town of white houses and green Venetian blinds, of beautiful little flower-gardens and beautiful waving elms, of grape-vines and orchards of bake-shops and book-stores, of baked beans and brown bread religiously every Sabbath morning ; of many and handsome churches, of red brick public schools, of lovely walks and drives, of sociability and a slightly nasal accent, of literary culture, three daily and two weekly papers. Of these journals the *Phenix* is perhaps the chief ; its editor is admitted, even by men who differ from him in politics, to be by all odds the "smartest" man. The *Phenix* is the workingman's paper ; it advocates reform in factories and foundries, and Baymouth is great in both ; goes in for short hours and half-holidays, and is the delight of the operatives. North Baymouth is

black and grimy, is full of tangled streets, and big, ugly brick buildings, with more windows than "is in the king's house." Tall chimneys that vomit black smoke all day, and blot out the summer sky, belch forth fiery showers at night, and turn it lurid. Fierce whistles go off at noon and night, and men and women pour forth from these big buildings and fill the streets to overflowing, on their way to other big buildings where they go to feed. The taint of the smoke and the soot and the coal is on everything in North Baymouth—on green trees and soft grass, on white houses and tall church-spires. North Baymouth is not a handsome place; but handsome is that handsome does, and it sends carpets and cottons, furnaces and ranges, boilers and engines, all over the great country to which it is proud to belong, and feeds hundreds of men, women, and children, who might else go hungry.

North Baymouth is not handsome, but Baymouth proper is. Here are the dry-goods stores, here is plate-glass and gilding, here are wide, clean, tree-shaded streets; here rich men live and ride in their carriages; here their good ladies "walk in silk attire, and siller hae to spare;" and here, among other tall buildings, is the tall *Phoenix* building, with editors, compositors, and grimy boys, all *en deshabbille*, and too hot at that.

In his sanctum, in his editorial chair, in the sketchy costume distinctly mentioned before, sits Longworth of the *Phoenix*. It is not a large room, but a room three times the size could not be more littered. This litter is the more remarkable that the walls are fuller of virtuous and orderly precepts than a copy-book. "A PLACE FOR EVERYTHING AND EVERYTHING IN ITS PLACE" is conspicuously posted above the editor's desk. A place for nothing and nothing in its place appears to be the rule acted on. Waste-paper baskets, newspapers old and new, magazines and books for review (good or bad according to the temper Mr. Longworth chances to find himself in), chairs, stools, pipes, half-smoked

cigars, a head of Clytie on a pedestal surmounted by Mr. Longworth's old black velvet smoking-cap, a handsome plaster bust of Rosa Bonheur, which some one has improved by a charcoal mustache; heaps of letters brought by that day's afternoon post and not yet opened; and amid this confusion worse-confounded sits serenely the editor himself, a cigar held between his teeth, smoking and writing with a vast amount of energy. For about twenty minutes he goes on, scrape, scrape, never pausing a second, growing so absorbed that he forgets to puff and his cigar goes out, his face kindling as a war-horse in the thick of the fight. Finally, with a tremendous flourish, he finishes, falls back in his chair, removes his cigar, and nods in a satisfied way at his work.

"There!" says Mr. Longworth, "that will extinguish that consummate ass of the *News* for this week, I flatter myself. Now for these books—one, two, three, four, five of them. It is always best to do one's reviewing before dinner; hunger is apt to make a man clear-sighted for little literary failings, and sharpens the edge of the critical saber. A heavy dinner and a touch of indigestion are no mean preparations either. I'll make mince-meat of this batch, and then I'll go home. O'Sullivan!"

He raises his voice. The editorial door opens, and a short, stout man, with a pen in his hair and a paper in his hand, enters.

"Did ye call, chief?"

"Here's that settler I promised you for Doolittle of the *News*," says Longworth, handing him the wet MSS.—tomorrow's *Phenix* leader. "I'm off in half an hour. The first hot day always reduces my intellect to the consistency of melted butter. Inside pages printed, O.?"

"Just gone down stairs."

"Editorial page made up?"

"Principal part in type, sir."

"Well, have this set up at once. I'll have the review

column ready in half an hour ; I shall make short work of them, for it is nearly dinner-time. I must look over my letters, too. Come back in half an hour sharp, O'Sullivan."

"All right, chief."

Mr. O'Sullivan, called usually in the office by the capital letter "O," disappears, and Longworth, taking up one after another of the pile of books, gives one rapid, keen, practiced, concise glance through the pages, notes the style, the subject, and if a novel, as three of them are, the plot, writes a critique of half a dozen lines on each, damning one with "faint praise," mildly sarcastic with another, sardonically facetious with a third, sneering cynically at a fourth, and savagely ferocious with the last. For, as the thirty minutes end, and Mr. Longworth's appetite grows clamorous, censorship grows more and more intolerant in direct ratio. It is with a weary gesture he pushes paper, books, and pen away, and rises at last.

A tall, fair man this editor of the Baymouth *Phoenix*—a man of thirty, with profuse blond beard and mustache, a fine, intellectual face, and handsome blue eyes with a lurking suspicion of humor in them—on the whole, a well-looking, stately, and rather distinguished man.

The doors open ; his second in command, O'Sullivan, enters, bears off the scathing review, and vanishes. Longworth tosses over his letters, on office business chiefly, glances through them with the same rapid, comprehensive glance he has given the books, throws most of them into the waste-paper basket, and out of the sheaf keeps only two. One of these is in a lady's hand ; this he naturally reads first, and as he reads a pleased expression comes into his face—a face that can be as expressionless as a dead wall, when he wills.

"H'm !" he thinks, "that is well. She will be here before the end of the week. I am glad of it. Don't know any one I miss as I do Hester Hariott. Perhaps I may meet her in New York, and travel down with her."

He looks at the second, pauses in the act of opening, knits his brows, turns it over, examines the superscription, as we all insanely do with a letter that puzzles us.

"Odd," he mutters; "what can *he* have to say at this late day? I never expected to see his chirography again."

He breaks it open, and reads—reads once, twice, and yet a third time.

"Private and Confidential"

"MACON, GA., May 5th.

"DEAR MR. LAURENCE: I have been meditating for some time past dropping you a line and a hint—a hint, no more. Mrs. Dexter is a shrewd little woman in her way, but I think Mrs. Dexter made a mistake in persuading Mr. Longworth to send Mr. Frank abroad. The old gentleman has broken greatly of late, and whatever attachment he may have had to the lad (and it never was very strong) absence has weakened. More than once of late he has spoken of you, and always with a touch of regret. He was very fond of you, Mr. Laurence, and very proud of you—he has never been either of young Dexter. What I wish to say is this: Can you not by some happy chance find yourself in this neighborhood shortly, on newspaper or lecturing business, let us say? It would be worth while to take the trip. One word from you would blot out the whole unfortunate past, and replace you in your uncle's regard. Will you ~~come~~ and say that word? Dexter will be at home in about a month; after that it may be too late.

"This, of course, is as unbusiness-like a letter as it is possible to write. Also, of course, I would never write it did I not know well of old the manner of man you are.

Yours, etc.,

"THOMAS CHAPMAN."

Longworth goes through this epistle for the third time with an unchanging face, then slowly and thoughtfully tears it in little pieces, and consigns it, in a white drift, to the waste-basket. There is rather a grim smile on his face as he puts on his coat.

"They do well who paint Fortune as a woman," he thinks. "She's a jade no man can trust, ready to kick you to-day and kiss you to-morrow; ready to flout you when you court

her, and fawn upon you when you snap your finger in her face. Very like a woman, every way you take her."

From which cynical soliloquy it may reasonably be inferred that Mr. Longworth's experience of the fairer sex, in spite of his good looks, has been unfortunate. He puts on his hat, and, in the yellow, tranquil evening, goes home. His way lies through pleasant, elm-shaded streets, and as he goes on, leaving the noise and jar of the town far behind, there comes to him, mingled with the fragrance of *mignonette* in the gardens he passes, the salt breath of the sea.

Baymouth is a seaport; many ships sail into its wide harbor; its wharves and docks ring with the tide of commerce, and presently they come in view, riding on the shining bosom of the bay.

Men nod or stop to speak to him in passing, ladies smile and bow—he is a man of note in the town; but his face keeps a look of reflective gravity all the way. The hint in the letter he has just destroyed is no trivial one—a noble inheritance hangs on it. He knows Chapman, shrewd lawyer and keen-sighted business man that he is, means more than meets the eye—has made certain of his ground before issuing that cautious "hint." He has been for years the legal adviser of his uncle. Is it at that uncle's desire he writes now? Long ago Laurence Longworth gave that uncle deadly offense, and lost a fortune. Than that uncle no propder man exists on earth; beyond this hint dropped by his attorney, his nephew knows he will never go. And in a month Dexter will be at home, and it may be too late.

"Poor old boy!" Longworth muses—meaning his uncle, not Dexter—"what a trump he used to be—what a prince's life I led of it—what a prince's life I might go back to! It is rather hard on Frank, though, to hold a fortune and favor by only a hair."

He reaches a large white house, with many green shutters, and a piazza or "stoop" running all along the front. If

faces the sea, and from this stoop, upon which wicker chairs are scattered, there spreads a view of the bay, glistening in the sunset, with vessels at anchor and many boats gliding about. The sweet salt wind blows in his face, and stirs a great honeysuckle that twines itself over the pillars. Climbing roses in pink clusters hang here, two or three large rose of Sharon trees in the grass-plot in front are in full leaf already. A pretty place—such a place as one sees everywhere in New England.

Mr. Longworth in his day—but it is a day far gone, when he was *very* young, and knew no better—has been a poet, has written and published a volume of verses. It is one of those juvenile indiscretions of which we all may have been guilty in different forms, and of which in our riper years we are properly ashamed. But, having been capable of poetic folly once, a little, a very little, of the old leaven lingers, and gives this hard-headed, clear-sighted editor and merciless reviewer a keen enjoyment of all that is exquisite in nature. It is unalloyed pleasure and rest, for example, to sit on this piazza, with the sensuous sweetness of the honeysuckle and roses about him, the saline freshness blowing in his face, and watch the bay yonder dimpling and blushing in the good-night kiss of the sun. He takes one of the wicker chairs, tilts it back, lights a cigar—he smokes as many cigars as a Cuban—elevates the editorial legs on the railing, where the roses twine around his boots, folds his arms, and prepares to think it out. To throw the *Phenix*, the pride of his heart and the apple of his eye, to the dogs—to be a millionaire or not a millionaire, that is the question; and, strange to say in this age of Golden Calf worship, Longworth actually thinks it worth debating.

The white house behind him is very still. The hall-door stands wide, there is a vista of long carpeted hall, a large picture on each side, a hat-rack adorned with many hats, and a wide stairway. No sound reaches him from within; but as

he sits and smokes, some one descends the stairs, comes towards the open door, sees him, approaches, and lays a very white, very plump, very ringed hand, on his shoulder. "Larry," says a soft voice.

"It is a young lady—well, not very young either—eight and twenty perhaps, and looking every day of it, chiefly because she is so luxuriously developed. Fat is not a word to be applied to a young lady, and if one says inclined to embonpoint, one does not do the truth strict justice. She is tall, there is not an angle anywhere about her; she has abundance of palest flaxen hair. She has two rather small, rather light, rather lazy blue eyes. She has a complexion like a baby's, milk-white, satin-smooth, and she is dressed in white, a knot of pale blue ribbon in her hair, a cluster of pale pink roses in her breast.

"Ah—d'ye do, Tot?" says Longworth, glancing carelessly over his shoulder. "Infernally—I beg your pardon—excessively hot, isn't it? Those merciless tyrants, the printers, kept me at my desk, shrieking for copy, until, between the heat and the mental pressure, I became reduced to the state of a—ah, a wilted lily. I resemble a wilted lily, don't I?" inquires Mr. Longworth, glancing over his shoulder again.

"Oh, yes, very like a lily," replies the young lady, laughing languidly. "Are you going to Emma Harris's birthday reception to-night?"

"Couldn't—couldn't possibly. You might knock me over with a feather now, so utterly prostrate am I. People shouldn't have birthdays during the summer solstice."

"People can't help being born, I suppose," retorts the young lady, cavalierly addressed as "Tot," with some indignation.

"People ought to help it," dogmatically persists Mr. Longworth, who never allows himself to be contradicted, on principle; "and if they are obstinate, and won't, they shouldn't

expect other people to victimize themselves on account of it. Totty, I am hungry; is dinner nearly ready?"

"The dinner hour is half-past six, you ought to know by this time, Mr. Longworth, unless yesterday's trip to Boston has impaired your memory," says another voice, and another lady presents herself, so like the first, with an additional twenty years added, that you do not need to look twice to know they are mother and daughter. "What is this Mr. O'Sullivan is saying about your going off to New York to-morrow?"

"How should I know? I am not *en rapport* with all the thoughts which pass through the gigantic mind of the O'Sullivan. What does he say?"

"That you are going to New York to-morrow."

"So I am."

"On business?"

"On business."

"How long shall you be gone?"

"Three days."

"I wish I might go with you," says Totty, plaintively. "Mamma, would it be improper for me to go to New York with Larry, and come back with him?"

"Eminently improper," says Larry himself; "not to be thought of. My subscribers are moral people—the circulation of the *Phenix* would go down to zero if they heard of such glaring immorality."

"But they need not hear of it," says Totty, still more plaintively; "and three days is such a very little while. I want to go shopping to Stewart's, and they are still having Italian opera at the Academy. It wouldn't be any harm, mamma—it's—only Larry."

"Here is Mrs. Windsor," interrupts her mother, with sudden animation. "Don't be a simpleton, Totty—of course you can't go. Only Larry, indeed! I wonder what Mrs. Windsor would say if she heard you."

"What Mrs. Windsor says is not an act of Congress," replies Totty. "She would go with Larry to New York fast enough, or anywhere else, if he asked her."

All this time Mr. Longworth has been placidly smoking and watching what is going on at the gate. A low phaeton and a pair of well-matched grays, driven by a black boy, have come down the street and drawn up before the house. In the carriage reclines a lady. The black boy assists her to alight, and she enters the gate and approaches the group on the piazza. She is a lady of fully sixty years, but stately, handsome, and upright, with a certain pride and majesty of bearing, very richly dressed in dark, soundless silk, a veritable cashmere trailing more like drapery than like a shawl over her shoulders and flowing skirts.

"Looks like one of Kneller's or Sir Joshua Reynolds' court ladies," murmurs Longworth; "makes a picture of herself always. Don't know any one, anywhere, such thoroughly good 'form' as Mrs. Windsor."

Totty shrugs her plump shoulders.

"Why don't you tell her so? There is no one living whose good opinion Mrs. Windsor values as she does yours. You are the only man on earth who would dare to tell her she looked well. And you know it."

Longworth smiles. He would be something less than man if he did not know the women who like him. And Longworth is thoroughly a man, and a man of the world.

He rises as this stately and distinguished new-comer ascends the steps, throws away his cigar, and takes off his hat.

"My dear Mrs. Windsor," begins the lady of the house, advancing with effusion, "so very pleased to see you. I heard only yesterday you were back. When did you return from Washington?"

"I have been home a week. You are looking well, Mrs. Longworth, but then I think you always do. Mrs. Sheldon"

(to Totty), you grow a very Hebe. Ah! Mr. Laurence, happy to meet you. They told me you had gone to Boston, and I was in doubt whether you had yet returned."

She holds out her hand with a slight smile—a hand that in a number-six glove looks like a perfect hand in dark gray marble. Her voice is low—a "trained" voice—smooth, courteous, cold as ice. The eyes that glance from the face of mother and daughter are chill as the voice, but they soften into quite another expression so quickly when they turn upon the man; that the change is almost startling.

"Only ran up for a day or two; got back this morning," returns Longworth in his off-hand fashion. "Going to New York to-morrow. Can I do anything for you there, Mrs. Windsor?"

"Nothing, thank you; my own visit has been too recent. Besides, I have not much faith in the way gentlemen fulfill ladies' commissions. Mrs. Sheldon, I suppose you go to Miss Harris's fête to-night?"

"Yes, I think so, Mrs. Windsor—mamma and I. Shall you?"

Mrs. Windsor raises her eyebrows slightly.

"I go nowhere, my dear Mrs. Sheldon. I grow an old woman, you know, and birthday fêtes have long lost their charms. Over fifty, one counts these anniversaries by one's gray hairs and wrinkles."

"But we all know that Mrs. Windsor is one of the fortunate few who never grow old," says Mrs. Longworth; "and we saw your name very often last winter at the great Washington receptions. Of course, though, the capital offers attractions our poor country town can never boast."

"I went out a little last winter. Yes," responds Mrs. Windsor, coldly. "Mr. Longworth," she says, turning to the gentleman, that subtle change in face and voice, "are you going?"

"No; Totty must make my excuses. What you say

about gray hairs and wrinkles is eminently true. I shall stay at home and count mine."

She smiles.

"You have no other engagement?"

"None."

"Then do me the favor to come and count the wrinkles at my house. I am very desirous of seeing you before you go to New York, on a matter of—business."

She makes a pause before the last word and looks at him as if afraid of refusal. Longworth, however, does not refuse.

"I spend my pleasantest evenings at your house, Mrs. Windsor. I shall be glad to go."

She draws a quick breath, as of relief, and turns to depart.

"I shall expect you then. Perhaps, though, you will let me take you with me at once?"

"Not now; I shall present myself about eight. Will that do?"

"Certainly. Good evening, Mrs. Longworth. How is it you never come to see me now?"

"Many commercial gentlemen and much gravy weigh on her mind," suggests Longworth, "as they must on all the successors of the immortal M. Todgers."

For this rose-wreathed white house, facing the bay, is a boarding-house, and Mrs. Longworth, widow, and a distant cousin of the editor of the *Phenix*, the lady who keeps it.

Mrs. Windsor does not know "M. Todgers;" she is not a lady addicted to novel-reading of any sort, but she smiles graciously, because the remark is Longworth's, and slowly and gracefully moves away, re-enters her carriage, and is driven off.

"What can she want of you now, Larry?" says Totty as though it were no unusual thing for Mrs. Windsor to want Larry.

"Do you know," says Mrs. Longworth, with a short laugh, "what people would say if Mrs. Windsor were thirty years younger? That she wanted to marry Larry."

Mr. Longworth has resumed his smoking and his chair. He glances over his shoulder at the speaker.

"That's a beastly remark, Mrs. Longworth," he says, "don't make it again."

"There's the dinner-bell," says Totty, and she and her mamma vanish precipitately.

Mr. Longworth puts down his legs lazily, gets up, mounts to his bed-room, makes some improvement in his toilet leisurely, for, although the dinner-bell has rung and the select circle of boarders may be waiting, he is never in a hurry.

"Yes, what does she want?" he thinks. "It would be remarkable if I received two of Fortune's kisses in one day. More remarkable still if I were forced to decline both."

He descends to dinner, which is a lively meal. Mrs. Longworth, one of those sometimes trying people who have seen better days, offers all the comforts of a home through the columns of the daily press, and has fifteen boarders in all. There are two or three ladies, but these are exceptions. The Salic law is enforced, and single gentlemen are the Spartan rule. Mr. Miles O'Sullivan, sub-editor of the *Phoenix*, sometime graduate of Maynooth, lineal descendant of the Kings of Kerry, is one of these. It is a prolonged meal; the gentlemen like to sit and crack nuts and jokes together, long after the ladies flit away. Now the twilight steals into the room, the sea-breezes arise cool and delicious, and the scent of the honeysuckle nearer and sweeter than all. Faint and far away the singing of some sailors floats on the wind; a new spring moon shines in the sky—one brilliant star, *dame d'honneur* to the queen of night, beside it. In the parlors across the hall some one is playing Thalberg's "Last Rose;" when the piano stops you can hear the soft wash of the surf down on the shore. Longworth lies back in his chair in true

after-dinner mood, dreamy and indolent, dips his walnuts in his wine, listens to the other men, but does not talk much. Presently the laughter and jokes—very elderly jokes some of them—grow tiresome, and he rises and returns to his former place and position on the piazza. The boarders flit in and out, one or two of the ladies are good enough to sit beside him and rally him on his thoughtfulness. But Longworth's moods are well known, and as a rule respected, in this select boarding-house.

"Larry," says Mrs. Totty Sheldon, coming out in her muslin dress and pink roses, and looking cool and white in the faint light, "is it not time you were keeping your appointment?"

"Mr. Longworth an appointment," cries a vivacious young matron; "that accounts for his silent incivility. With a lady, I bet."

"With a lady," answers Totty; "only a quarter of eight, Larry, and she is not a lady to be kept waiting."

Longworth rises, still with the dreamy laziness of after-dinner upon him, picks up his hat, and strolls off, without paying the slightest attention to the fair creatures around him. The volatile little matron, who is a bride, and pretty, and used to attention, looks piqued.

"Odd man, your cousin, Mrs. Sheldon," she says; "sometimes so silent and glum, at others perfectly charming to listen or talk to. He is your cousin, is he not?"

"His father and mine were," Mrs. Sheldon answers.

"And he and Totty came very near being something nearer and dearer than second cousins," interposes an old matron; "only Totty threw him over for Mr. Sheldon."

"Did you, really?" says the bride, looking at her curiously. "He does not seem like the sort of man one could throw over. How had you the courage? Such a handsome and clever fellow?"

"We were only children," says Totty, in a low voice; but

she looks away from the questioner, out at the long, slender line of light on the sea. "I was only a little girl, and Larry nothing but a boy."

"You were a little girl old enough and big enough to marry Willy Sheldon——"

"Totty!" her mother calls sharply, coming suddenly forward, "if you are going to Mrs. Harris's to-night, it is time you were dressing, instead of standing chattering nonsense here."

Totty bites her lips, but obeys. Twenty-eight and a widow though she be, she still feels compelled to mind her mother.

Mrs. Longworth turns, with some acerbity, to the young bride.

"Please don't allude to this again, Mrs. Beckwith," she says. "There was some boy-and-girl folly between Mr. Longworth and my daughter years ago, but it was only folly. I don't approve of cousins marrying—even distant cousins. Don't speak of it in his presence, I beg."

The elder matron laughs softly and significantly to herself.

"Does not approve of cousins marrying," she thinks; "and it was only boy-and-girl folly, was it? How our views change as we grow older! At least it was folly that has cost Mr. Larry dear."

The younger matron looks puzzled.

"Something queer here?" she thinks. "I wonder Mr. Longworth likes to stay." But she only bows, and says: "Oh, certainly not," and, as the charm of the stoop has departed with Mr. Longworth, goes in.

Meantime, Mr. Longworth pursues his way, in his usual leisurely manner, through various streets, until he comes to an iron railing and two tall, handsome iron gates. The place inclosed looks like a park in this pale light—it is extensive, and full of large trees.

He enters, and goes up a gravel walk, broad and well kept, trees meeting overhead and making the darkness blackness. From this arcade he emerges into an open space, the grass close-clipped and dotted with little beds of flowers.

A dark, large house looms up, with lights shining from its windows, and a glass arch over the hall doors. He glances at two windows to the right; through these the lamplight shines, red and comfortable, through lace curtains, and seems to welcome him even before he enters. A large, old-fashioned brass knocker is on the door; he lifts this and knocks loudly.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STORY OF THE STONE HOUSE.



WHILE Mr. Longworth knocks and waits in the starlight to be admitted, a word may be said of this house, and the lady who owns it.

It has a name and a history, and is perhaps the only house in Baymouth that has either. It is called the Stone House. Many years back there came over from England a man named William Windsor, a sturdy and thrifty yeoman, tolerably well-to-do at home, and resolute to make a fortune in the colonies. He chose New England, got a grant of land, built a log cabin, shot Indians, tilled the soil, and led a busy life of it. Time passed; the revolution began, and this Englishman shouldered his musket and took the side of the colonies against the king. The war ended, and though Master William Windsor left a leg and one arm on the field of glory, he returned well satisfied, for another grant of land had been awarded him, and all about his dwelling for many and many

a mile was his. Thinking it not well for man to be alone, even part of a man as he now was, he took unto himself a wife of the daughters of the land—a blooming Puritan maiden, far and away too patriotic to refuse a one-legged hero—reared a family, and in his old age saw the Stone House erected in all its strength and stateliness by his eldest son. Then he died and was gathered to his fathers, and years went on and Baymouth grew and prospered, and the Windsors with it, and they were the wealthiest and oldest family in all the town. Mills and manufactories arose on their land, noble timber was cut down, and the Windsors need be farmers no more, but sit at home at ease and let their income flow in like a golden river. Nobody knew exactly how rich the last Henry Windsor was when he became master, but enormously, everybody said. He married a young lady of Boston, one of the fairest of all its fair daughters, proud and uplifted as a young queen, and brought her home to the Stone House.

Two children were born, only two. Mrs. Windsor was born to be a mother of sons, and knew it, and was intensely disappointed to find the younger of these two only a girl. Girls being one of the evils of this life that cannot be cured and must be endured, the lady of the Stone House accepted her fate, but bitterly and under protest to the end. To her son she gave love, loyally and liberally and lavishly, without stint or measure; to her daughter, almost indifference. They grew up; the son went to Harvard, the daughter to a fashionable boarding-school in New York. Both had done credit to their name and their family, both were handsome; the son was clever, and though brains are a superfluity in the only son of a rich man, it still pleased his mother that he had them. George was nineteen, Mary seventeen, when the first blow fell.

It fell in the person of an extremely handsome young man, who arrived in Baymouth one day, and sought an interview with Mrs. Windsor. He was a Frenchman, his name Mon-

sieur Hippolyte Landelle, his profession teacher of modern languages at Madame Campion's fashionable seminary, his errand—to ask Henry Windsor, Esquire, for the hand of his only and richly-dowered daughter.

To say that Henry Windsor was stricken dumb by this matchless audacity would do no sort of justice to his feelings. He sat and glared at the young man, who, tall and slender, with handsome olive face and black, melancholy eyes, stood and awaited his answer. What that answer was exactly can never be told. "Our army in Flanders" never swore harder than Mr. Henry Windsor knew how to do when exigency required. Monsieur Landelle must have found it unpleasant, for he left the paternal mansion leaden-white with passion and wounded pride.

Mr. Windsor sat down, red-hot with fury, and penned a letter to the preceptress of the seminary, which must have shocked that elegant lady to the last degree. He told her, among several other unpleasant things, to keep his daughter under lock and key for the next three days, at the expiration of which period he would arrive to take her home.

Mr. Windsor went. Madame Campion, unspeakably distressed, dismissed M. Hippolyte Landelle, and turned the key upon Miss Mary Windsor. But it is a very old truism that Love laughs at locksmiths. When Mr. Windsor arrived on the spot he found his daughter flown, and the traditional note left behind to say that life without *cher* Hippolyte would not be worth the living, that they had been married the day before, and would sail in an hour by the Havre steamer.

Mr. Windsor returned home. How bitter the blow to these two haughty and imperious people no human being ever knew. The father was wounded both in his pride and his love, for he had been fond of his one "little maid;" the mother smarted in her pride alone. Every trace of that lost daughter was obliterated, her name was erased from the great family Bible, her portrait in oil, her photographs, books,

drawings, burned. She was not to be as a daughter dead, but as a daughter who had never existed.

Three years later Mr. Windsor died, and handsome George was master of the Stone House. He was a fair-haired young giant, who might well have been the darling of any mother's heart—blue-eyed, stalwart, sunny-faced as a young Norse god. He was far more than the darling of his mother—he was her idol, the life of her life. All the love of her soul she gave him, and George, in careless young man fashion, was fond of his stately and handsome mother.

One night—oh, dark and terrible night, never to be forgotten!—a schooner drifted on some sunken rocks near the entrance of the harbor. It was winter, a night with a gale howling and the cold deadly—the two or three poor fellows clinging to the frozen rigging must be taken off at once or perish. A boat was manned, and George Windsor, brave, generous, and full of adventure, made one of the volunteer crew. It was desperate work to launch the boat, desperate work to keep her afloat in that howling winter tempest. All at once a fiercer blast than the others struck her broadside, and she went over. In a moment they had righted her again in spite of the storm, and the freezing crew clambered in. All but George Windsor! He could not swim; his mother had always kept her darling away from that treacherous bay, and in the darkness he went down like a stone. His last cry: "Save me, boys, I'm sinking," rang in the ears of his mother (for they told her) until they were dead to every sound of earth.

Some time that night, while she sat restlessly waiting for him, the clergyman of the church she usually attended came slowly and sadly into her presence. How he told her he hardly knew. She stood and heard him in stony silence, her eyes fixed and blind, turned from him mechanically, made a step to the door, and fell like a stone. She was a strong woman, and had never fainted in all her life before, but for

hours she lay now like the dead. Perhaps death would have been the greater mercy ; but life came back, and they went away and left her alone with her awful despair.

Three days after they found him washed ashore some miles lower down, and in two more a long, sad procession went out from the Stone House, a house from which many dead men had gone. They laid in the earth the last of all the Windsors, and a monument that was a marvel of beauty, and sculpture, and cost, was erected over him. Then the Stone House was shut up, and for six long years Mrs. Windsor saw it no more.

A stern and resolute woman this Mrs. Windsor, a proud and bitterly rebellious one. Once in her hearing that well-meaning clergyman had said :

"It is one of the mysterious dispensations of Providence. She made a god of her son, and a jealous God has taken him."

From that moment, in her fierce vindictiveness, she arrayed herself against the awful Arbiter of Life and Death, and never until the day of her own death crossed the threshold of a church again.

George Windsor had been dead some fifteen years when Laurence Longworth first came to Baymouth, bought out the *Phenix*, going rapidly to the dogs in the hands of its then proprietor, and established himself as a permanent fixture in the town. Mrs. Windsor had long been back and resumed her old life—how unspeakably lonely and desolate a life no one ever knew. She would have died in her relentless pride sooner than let any living soul see that broken and bleeding heart of hers. There are some things that not even time can help—this was one. But outwardly there was little change. She even went into society more than of old, and opened her house more frequently to her friends. And it was at one of these reunions—a dinner-party given by a magnate of the town, and where Mrs. Windsor, handsome, cold, repellent, and superbly dressed, was a guest of distinction—that she and

Longworth first met. As she sat in the drawing-room after dinner, listlessly allowing herself to be entertained, she overheard the words of two men behind her.

"So that's the new man of the *Phenix*. H'm! good head and frontal development. Looks as if he might know how. Doesn't he look like some one I've seen before?"

"He looks like poor George Windsor. You remember young Windsor, don't you—drowned some dozen years ago? The mother, fine-looking, stern-looking lady in black velvet, is here this evening. He resembles George sufficiently to be a long-lost brother."

The men moved away, and Mrs. Windsor, with a feeling as if a knife had pierced her, looks for the first time intently at the tall, fair-haired young man, leaning lightly against the chimney-piece, and earnestly conversing with a little group of men. Her face paled, her eyes dilated, her lips parted, her breath came quick. He was like George—so like that the mother's heart thrilled and trembled within her. It was one of those accidental resemblances that startle all at times, and yet she could hardly have defined where it lay. The shades of hair, eyes, and skin were the same; the figure of this young man was tall and strong as George's had been; even a subtle trick of smile and glance that her boy had had, this stranger possessed.

It troubled her at first; gradually, as they met oftener, it comforted her, and at last, after years of acquaintanceship, Laurence Longworth took the place in her childless, widowed heart that she would once have thought it sacrilege to fill. People began to observe her marked partiality for the young editor, and to smile and opine that his fortune was made. Miles O'Sullivan one day—not long before this night upon which Longworth stands waiting for admittance before the Stone House—put the general opinion into words.

"Upon me conscience, Larry, 'tis better to be born lucky than rich. Here's the Widow Windsor, long life to her,

ready to leave you everything she's worth in the world if ye behave yourself. And a mighty pretty penny it must be."

"I wouldn't take it," replies Longworth, coolly.

"Ye wouldn't, wouldn't ye? And why, if it's pleasing to ye?"

"Mrs. Windsor has her natural heirs—her daughter and her daughter's children."

"Mighty unnatural ones if all I hear be true. Sure, the daughter ran away with a Frinchman—the Lord look on her!—and has been disowned this many a day."

"That is nothing to me. I would not accept Mrs. Windsor's money while they are alive to claim it."

"Oh! then, by this and that, I wish a widow woman or any other woman would offer me a fortune. It's twice—yes, faith, maybe three times, I'd be thinking before I threw it back in her face."

"You would do precisely as I would do, O. You couldn't take it. But doesn't it strike you that this is an uncommonly cheeky, premature discussion? It is never well to refuse before one is asked."

What Mr. Longworth thinks about his chances himself, no one knows. Silence is this gentleman's forte. But so matters stand this sultry May night, upon which he stands and knocks at Mrs. Windsor's door.

CHAPTER V.

A POINT OF HONOR.



MIDDLE-AGED woman-servant admits him, and Longworth enters a long, low, very spacious hall, softly carpeted, hung with rich pictures, and adorned on either side by a stern Roman soldier in bronze, leaning

on his sword. Four doors flank this wide hall; the first of these to the right the woman opens, says "Mr. Longworth, ma'am," and departs.

The room, on the threshold of which he stands for a moment and gazes, as at a picture, is one that is very familiar, and that never fails to give his artistic eye pleasure. It is Mrs. Windsor's sitting-room; here none but intimate friends (and she has very few) find her. It is a square apartment, carpeted in pale, cool colors, gray and blue, curtained in white lace, soft chairs and sofas also blue and gray, a full-length mirror at each end, two inlaid tables, whereon repose some large albums and Books of Beauty, but not another volume of any sort; water-color sketches and line engravings on the walls, both perfect of their kind, and a few heads in Parian from the antique; pretty and expensive trifles everywhere. Two or three slender glasses of cut flowers perfume the air, the light falls soft and shaded, wealth and refined taste speak to you in every detail, and meet you again in the figure of the lady, who rises to greet her guest. Her heavy silk falls about her in those soft, large, noiseless folds that women love; some point lace at the throat is caught with one great gleaming diamond. Her hair, profuse still, but silvery white, is combed back over a roll, and adds to the severe immobility of that pale, changeless face. No, not changeless, for it lightens and softens as she gives him her hand.

"You are punctuality itself, Mr. Laurence," she says; "it is precisely eight."

She resumes her chair, folds her white hands, upon which many jewels twinkle, in her lap. There are women so womanly, or so restlers, that they can never sit contentedly quite idle—some piece of flimsy feminine handicraft must ever be between their fingers. Mrs. Windsor is not one of these; she can sit for hours with those white hands folded, her eyes half closed, without the necessity of either needle-work or book occurring to her.

Longworth has a chair in this room, sacred for the past two years to his use, a very comfortable and caressing chair, indeed, and into its open arms he consigns himself now, leans his blonde head against its azure back with a feeling he has often had before—that this room is a very comforting and restful place, and Mrs. Windsor one of the most thoroughly satisfactory women he has ever met. As she sits before him in her lustrous silks and jewels, her serene, high-bred face and *trainante* voice, she has all the “stilly tranquil” manner of a real grand dame. At sixty she is a woman to command admiration, and Longworth admires her; but it is surely a deeper and stronger feeling that looks out of her eyes upon him. If she ever gave her lost idol greater love, then indeed she must have loved beyond the love of mothers.

They talk for a time after the desultory fashion of friends. She tells him of her winter in Washington, and of the celebrities, foreign, political, literary, and musical, she has met there. But her usual animation is wanting; it is not to talk of these things she has asked him to come here. She is rarely at a loss, but she seems to be somewhat so to-night, and it is Mr. Longworth himself who, as the clock strikes nine, breaks the ice.

“You made some allusion to business this afternoon,” he says. “Is it anything in which I can be of service? Anything about the mills——”

“Nothing about the mills. Thompson is a very competent man of business, and sees to that. Laurence, when I was in Washington, I made my will.”

She says it abruptly. Longworth, lying back easily, looping and unlooping his watch-chain, lifts his eyebrows.

“Always a wise precaution,” he answers, “but in your case quite premature. Still, it is well to have these things settled and done with.”

“And, Laurence, I have made you my heir.”

It has come. In spite of her marked partiality for him, which he understands and which touches him,—in spite of O'Sullivan's words, he has hardly ever glanced at this possibility. He is a man absorbed in his work, work which suits him thoroughly; he has no especial ambition for sudden and great wealth. Yet sudden and great wealth is offered him here. He sits quite still, and there is a brief silence, her face slightly agitated, his showing no shadow of change. At last:

"I am sorry to hear this," are his first words. "It cannot be. I am deeply grateful, but it cannot be."

"Why not?"

"Dear madam, do you need to ask? You have a daughter——"

"I have no daughter," she interrupts, her voice low and cold. "I have had none for twenty-one years. I have doubly none now, for she is dead."

"Is she dead? I regret to hear that."

"I do not," says Mrs. Windsor, icily.

"But she has left children—you mentioned the fact to me once yourself. She has left daughters, and your daughter's daughters are your heirs—not I?"

"The daughters of the Frenchman, Landelle, will never inherit a penny of mine."

"My dear Mrs. Windsor, pardon me—they ought, they must. They are the last of your line; your blood is theirs. Do not visit the sin of their father, if sin it was, upon them. In any case I shall not usurp their right."

"You absolutely refuse?"

"I absolutely refuse. It is quite impossible for me to take this inheritance of your grand-daughters."

"You are magnanimous," she says, with a brief and very bitter laugh. "You are one of the world's wonders—a man who can refuse a fortune."

"I don't think I stand alone," he says, coolly. "Think

better of mankind, my dear madame. I fancy I know some men who would decline to rob two orphan girls of their birthright. It must be theirs, dear lady, not mine."

"It shall never be theirs," she retorts, cold, repressed passion in her tone; "they were nothing, less than nothing to me before. If you persist in thwarting me for their sakes, you will make me absolutely hate them."

"I must persist, and you will not hate them. Do you not see I would be utterly unworthy of the regard with which you honor me, if I do this. In your heart you would despise me, and your contempt would be as nothing to the contempt I would feel for myself. It is best for a man to stand well with himself. I would be simply robbing your grand-daughters if I accepted their rightful inheritance—be nothing better than any other thief. I feel all your great goodness, believe me—feel it so deeply that I have no words to thank you; but if, indeed"—his voice grows low and tender—"you give me some of that affection you once gave your son, let me use it to plead for your grandchildren. Send for them, bring them here, if their father will resign them, and my word for it love will follow, and the right will be done."

"Their father is dead," she says, drearily.

"And they stand in the world quite alone. Then truly it is time they were here. This is their home, you are their mother. Forget the past, let death blot it out; send for these young ladies, and let them be the comfort and blessing of your later life."

She sits, her quiet hands folded, stung—deeply stung in her affection for this man, and in her pride. He sees the diamonds darting rays of fire on her fingers and at her throat, sees the hard, cold look that sternly sets her face.

"This is your final and absolute decision?" she asks in a low voice. "You will not think twice—you will not change your mind?"

"I will not change my mind. It is simply impossible."

"Not even," she says, looking at him fixedly, "if I refuse hence and for all to have these French girls here, and leave the fortune you despise to the town?"

"Not even then. Nothing can alter in the slightest degree the decision I have just expressed."

"You are indeed a man of iron mold," she says, with that slight, bitter smile. "Well, I will not press the matter. Only one point more. Suppose at my death the will I have just made is found intact—what then?"

"Then it will become my duty to search out your granddaughters, and transfer it to them without an hour's loss of time."

"Very well." She takes from the pocket of her dress a letter, removes the envelope, and passes it to him. "Read that," she says, briefly.

Longworth obeys—it is written in delicate feminine tracery, and is brief enough:

"LONDON, April 17th, 18—.

"MADAME OUR GRANDMOTHER: Two months ago our father died, and his latest wish was, that we would write this letter and go to you. All the letters we have sent have been unanswered, even that written by our mother on her death-bed, beseeching you to take pity on her children. Under these circumstances we would not force ourselves upon you had we any other home, but our aunt in Rouen is also dead. You are our sole remaining parent; yours is the only home, the only protection we can claim on earth. We come to you therefore. We will sail from Liverpool for New York early in May, and if you will have the goodness to send some one to meet us there we will be deeply grateful. We desire to know and to love you, madame, and with the most affectionate sentiments we are, your granddaughters,

"MARIE AND REINE LANDELLE."

Longworth finishes the letter and looks up with a half smile.

"Did you ever read anything more coolly audacious?" she demands in suppressed anger.

"It is a cool production, certainly; its author I judge to

be an eminently self-possessed and resolute young lady. Still she is quite right. She obeys the dying wishes of her parents, and comes, as she says, to her rightful home."

"I deny her right. Her parents had no shadow of claim upon me, and neither have the demoiselles Landelle."

"Have you answered this letter?" asks Longworth, looking at it curiously.

"Certainly not."

"Then they may even now be on their way here."

"They are not only on their way, but their steamer is due in New York the day after to-morrow. They cabled at starting, like a pair of princesses."

"Had I accepted your offer," he says, still half smiling, "how would you have acted in this complication?"

"There would have been no complication. Had you accepted my offer, as you would have done were you a wise man, I would not have shown you this letter. I would have gone to New York, met them, then taken a return passage for them in the next ship, and sent them back where they came from."

"Madame, you would not have been so cruel!"

"Do you call it cruel? This beggar, Landelle, carried off my daughter, a silly fool of seventeen, for her fortune, hoping, no doubt, that, like stage parents, the flinty father and mother would relent. He robbed me of my daughter—why should I receive his? I might not have sent them back penniless; I might have settled a life annuity upon each, and am ready to do so still if you will do as I desire. Think it over, Laurence—it is no bagatelle of a few thousands you are rejecting—and I will send them back. I do not want them here. You have only to say the word."

"I would be a brute and a scoundrel if I said it. Do not let us speak of the inheritance again. Let us consider that question forever at rest. Your granddaughters must come,

and they must be met in New York as they say. I wonder, by the by, what steamer they cross in ? ”

“The Hesperia.”

“The Hesperia ! Why, that is Miss Hariott’s ship. They will have crossed together.”

“Probably,” said Mrs. Windsor. She does not like Miss Hariott—they are of different orders of women, and perhaps without knowing it she is jealous of Longworth’s regard.

“Then our business ends here ?” she says, calmly, after a short silence. “You refuse my offer, and these young women are to come. Mr. Longworth, will you be the one to meet them ? I would not trouble you, but that you tell me you are going to New York.”

“It will be no trouble ; it will be a great pleasure. Yes, I will meet them and bring them home.”

And then silence falls, and in that silence the clock on the mantel strikes ten. Longworth rises.

“As I start by the first train I will get to bed betimes. Good-night, my dear Mrs. Windsor, and for two or three days, good-by.”

“Good-by,” she says, and rises and looks full in his eyes. “You have disappointed me more cruelly to-night, Laurence, than I ever thought mortal man could do again.”

“But you do not care for me the less, I know,” he answers. “Your regard is something I hold very precious ; I cannot afford to lose it. How truly I return it, how profound is my gratitude to-night, it would be useless for me to try to tell. From my heart I thank you.”

He holds both her hands in his close, warm grasp. He is the least demonstrative of men ; to most people he is cold, silent, self-centered, but this widowed mother’s regard for him has always seemed in his eyes a sacred and pathetic thing.

He is out once more in the still starlight, windless and and warm.

Two of Fortune's kisses in one day—well, yes, it is rather odd. To decline these kisses seems to him no particular heroism—nothing more than any man of principle might do. He would like well enough to be a rich man, but not at the cost of self-respect. If he held no other code than the old Pagan code of honor, if he were not a Christian gentleman, that code of honor would still compel him to do as he had done to-night.

"I may as well write to Chapman, too," he thinks, "and make an end of it. My uncle took me up twenty years ago, and let me go adrift on the world after—my own fault, I know, but it is rather late in the day to whistle me back. Now he has taken up young Dexter, and, when the whim seizes him, is ready to throw him to the dogs and reinstate me. How long would I hold his favor, I wonder? and if I were sent into outer darkness a second time, who would be heir-apparent number three? So I am to meet grandmamma's granddaughters! Humph! Mrs. Windsor's granddaughters ought to be pretty."

He reaches home, lets himself in, and goes up to his room at once. They are singing and playing cards in the parlor, but he feels in no mood for music or cards. His room is a large, airy, front chamber, the walls piled high with books, a few fine engravings hung among them. He turns up the gas, sits down, and dashes off his letter on the spot.

"BAYMOUTH, MASS., May 20, 18—.

"DEAR CHAPMAN: Quite impossible for me to go South this year. Could not think of stealing down in Frank Dexter's absence and supplanting him. Would it not rather look like the work of a sneak? Sorry to hear the governor is breaking. Should like to see him immediately, and shake hands, if I could. But I cannot, as things are. Have not the slightest ill feeling toward him; I consider him letting me start out to fight Fate single-handed as the very best thing he ever did me. As to creeping in behind Dexter's back and trying to curry favor, I could not do it, you know. The *Phoenix* keeps me in bread, and beef-steaks, and books—just at present I ask no more. Waiting for dead

men's shoes would never agree with my constitution. Dexter's a likely young fellow besides, and, as his mother has worked so hard for a fortune, I think he ought to have it. My uncle has no right to bring him up a prince and turn him out a pauper. So I cannot go, Chapman: but, all the same, I am obliged to you, and remain as ever, etc.,

"LAURENCE LONGWORTH."

"P. S. —Let me know if there is any danger. I should not like the dear old uncle to go without one good-by. He was awfully good to me in the old days.

L. L."

CHAPTER VI.

GRANDMAMMA'S GRANDDAUGHTERS.



R. LONGWORTH is up betimes next morning, and on his way to the office. He has a few letters to answer, and instructions to give to his chief staff officer, O'Sullivan. These do not occupy him long; as eight strikes he is standing on the piazza of the white house, looking out over the broad bay, with its multitudinous waves flashing in the sunshine, and listening to the shrill chattering of the little brown sparrows in the trees. Suddenly a harsh, discordant voice breaks the sylvan silence croaking his name.

"Larry! Larry! Larry!" shrieks this hoarse voice. "Kiss me, Larry! You're a fool, Larry! you're a fool! Oh, demmit!"

"Ah! you're there, are you?" says Longworth, glancing at an upper window where the author of these remarks sits in the sun.

"You're a fool, Larry! a fool, a fool! Oh demmit! Sacré bleu! donner und blitzen! You're a fool! you're a fool!"

Longworth's response to this torrent of bad language is a grin. He turns, looks up, and nods familiarly.

"Good-morning, Polly; you're in a heavenly temper this morning as usual, I see. I shall have to go and see about your breakfast, or you will curse up hill and down dale for the rest of the day."

For the speaker is a parrot, in a large, gilded cage—a bird whose looks are handsomer than her conversation, as she swings with her red head on one side, her black eye fiercely cocked, a bird of tenacious black claws, dangerous black bill, breast of brilliant green and gold, tail and wings vivid crimson and blue. Polly's principal command of language is in English, but she can swear with admirable fluency in two or three other languages. She is the pupil and property of Frank Dexter, who bought her, upon the occasion of his last visit to Baymouth, from a Dutch skipper, devoted a couple of weeks exclusively to her education, and left her as a precious legacy and solace of his leisure hours to his cousin, Longworth. She is still screaming, "Kiss me, Larry! You're a fool, Larry! *Sacré bleu!* Oh, demmit!" when that gentleman disappears.

Mr. Longworth reaches New York by nightfall, and spends the evening at one of the theaters. He attends to the business that has brought him next day, ascertains that the *Hesperia* will not reach her pier until eleven to-morrow, visits a few friends, and dines with sundry congenial souls at a literary club to which he belongs.

Next day, at eleven sharp, he is down on the pier waiting for the *Hesperia*, and grandmamma's granddaughters. Punctual as he is, the *Hesperia* is still more punctual. She is there before him, and her passengers are hurrying in wild haste hither and thither. Longworth boards her, glances about for any young ladies likely to answer the idea he has in his mind of the *Demoiselles Landelle*. He has not thought much about these young ladies. What he has

thought has not been exactly flattering. Even with right on their side that "round robin" of theirs has a stupendously cheeeky sound; their feelings, he opines, cannot be any too delicate or sensitive in thus forcing themselves, uninvited and unwelcome, even upon their grandmother. He sees many young girls, dark and dashing, fair and stylish, but none that quite answer that private idea of the ladies Landelle. Presently he espies the captain, and makes for him.

"I am in search of two young ladies due in this vessel," he says. "They are French, their names Landelle."

"My little ladies," cries the captain with animation; "they were afraid no one was coming to meet them after all. Are you a relative, sir?"

"No. Where are they?"

"In my cabin. This way, sir. All right, madame. I'll be back in a second. They are going to their grandmother. You are from her, I suppose?"

Longworth nods. The captain of the *Hesperia* throws open his cabin door, Longworth takes off his hat and stands in the presence of the French granddaughters.

"My little ladies," exclaims the captain, cheerily, "here he is at last, sent by grandmamma, and come to fetch you. And as I am tremendously busy, I will say good-by at once, and God-speed."

He shakes hands with both and departs. Longworth is alone with the orphan girls, whose case he pleaded at his own cost. Their eyes are upon him; what their opinion of him may be, he neither knows nor cares; his opinion of them—prompt and incisive as all his opinions are—is, that one is without exception the most beautiful girl he has ever seen. In his thirty-odd years of life he has seen many fair women—anything quite so faultlessly perfect as the taller of these two, he does not remember ever to have met. In days gone by, as has been said, he has been a poetaster; enough of the poet's adoration of the beautiful in all things still clings to

the prosaic man of business to make him yield spontaneous homage here. He has but the vaguest idea of separate details in his first moment, he is only conscious of a matchless whole. He hazily realizes that she is tall and very graceful, that she has masses of lovely hair of that peculiar and rare tint known as Italian red, that she has yellow-brown eyes, a complexion of pink and pearl, and is dressed in gray. The sister he just glances at—few men would do more than just glance at her with that other radiant vision in view—and in that glance, notes that she is small and dark, rather plain than pretty, and that she is watching him earnestly with two large black eyes. He turns to the taller and fairer, and as she looks, the older of the two, no trace of the admiration he certainly feels in his face—his look, as they see it, cool, steadfast, critical, matter-of-fact.

"My name is Longworth," he says, concisely; "I live in Baymouth, and as business was bringing me to New York, your grandmother, Mrs. Windsor, requested me to meet you here, and escort you there. I will place you in a cab now, if you are ready, and then will see after your baggage."

A faint amused smile, which she bites her pretty lips to repress, dawns in the fair face, as its owner stands quietly before him and listens. Evidently she is not accustomed to being addressed by gentlemen in that cavalier fashion, evidently also the brusquerie does not offend her. She bows without a word, accepts the arm he offers, the small dark demoiselle takes the other, and in profound silence Mr. Longworth leads them to, and places them as per promise in the cab. Then he disappears in search of the luggage, and Marie Landelle looks at her sister and laughs outright.

"Here's richness, Reine! Ursa Major in the flesh—much too good-looking to be such a bear. Longworth! where have I heard that name before?"

"You have heard it from me," says Reine. "Mr. Dexter and Mees Hariott talked of him perpetually. He seems

to be a great friend of that lady—Mr. Dexter said a lover, but he appears too young for that, and that tall monsieur was always *farceur*. Marie, he looked at us coldly, almost sternly; if grandmamma's messenger is like that, Mon Dieu! what will not grandmamma be?"

"A very dragon, but withal a very great lady, if all poor mamma used to say were true, and *une grande dame* at least will not be discourteous. Be she cold as snow, and hard as stone, I will still melt and soften her, or fail for the first time. As to the tall blonde monsieur, with the cold, stern blue eyes, what does it signify? How very like an English man he is."

The tall, blonde monsieur, with the stern blue eyes, appears as she says it, informs them briefly that their property is all right, mounts beside cabby, gives his order, lights a cigar, and they rattle off to one of the grand Broadway hotels. He puffs his cigar, watches the crowd and the familiar streets, and thinks of his fair cargo. "Mrs. Windsor's granddaughters ought to be pretty"—well, one is not actually, the other is something more. The small dark one looks French, the tall, fair one thoroughly English. She speaks English perfectly, too, with hardly an accent, but that is to be expected from constant association with her mother, and her life in London. By-the-by, he wonders why Landelle has lived in London, teaching no doubt. Then his thoughts drift to Miss Harriott—he has not seen her, she must have got off before he came. How will Madame Windsor receive these two young people? Civilly he hopes, icily he knows; but, then, they must have made up their minds to pocket their pride when they determined to force themselves upon her.

"Apropos," he muses; "if she sets up that regal beauty *La Fille aux Yeux d'Or*, as Balzac hath it, that 'tall, fair maiden full of grace,' as an heiress, presents her as such at the imperial court of Washington next winter, what an

enormous sensation she will create, what a brilliant hit in the holy estate of matrimony she may achieve. But unless the power of beauty is greater than even I give it credit for (and I credit it with being the greatest power of earth) Mrs. Windsor won't. They must have designs upon her fortune too, nothing else would have brought them. What would they say, I wonder, if they knew of that will made last winter?"

As he thinks it, a sudden inspiration flashes upon him, so brilliant an idea that he smiles in a grim fashion to himself.

"Upon my word, that would be an easy way to reconcile difficulties, do the correct thing, and gain a couple of millions. I cannot take Mrs. Windsor's money, but I could marry *la belle blonde* and take half of it. Grandmamma would not decline the alliance, and if *mademoiselle* is so keen for a fortune she would not refuse even with the incumbrance of a husband. It would be worth while on both sides, and though it is not for an outside barbarian to judge of conjugal bliss, I think it would be pleasant to look at a face like that across the breakfast-table three hundred and sixty-five days every year.

They reach the hotel and are conducted to their rooms—very spacious and elegant rooms, but with the bare dreariness pervading their elegance that is the essential atmosphere of hotels. It is now one o'clock; Mr. Longworth lingers to inform them that he will call to take dinner at three, and once more forsakes them.

"I don't think I shall like your Mr. Longworth, Petite," remarks Marie, letting down all that abundant abundance of red gold-hair, "he is too brisque. I think all Americans were something like Frenchmen in their association of the *petits spins*. He is everything that there is of the most English."

"He looks sensible, and I think clever," Reine responds, "and not at all like a gentleman to be affected by the good or bad opinion of two girls. What very handsome rooms,

and what a very bright and busy street. It is like the boulevards in Rouen."

The two young ladies make their toilets, and then sit amused and interested, and watch the steady stream of people, the ceaseless procession of reeling omnibuses, and the pretty street costumes of the ladies. Three o'clock comes, and with it, punctual to a second, Mr. Longworth who escorts them down to the great dining-hall, leads them to a little table under a window, where they can feast their eyes and their palates together. The dinner is very good, and Mlle. Marie, who likes good dinners, appreciates the delicate French cookery, and the dry champagne. There is not much talking; what there is she and Mr. Longworth monopolize. Reine sits with her dark still face, and large, thoughtful eyes fixed more on the street than on her plate. Her taste has not been cultivated as her sister's has, delicate dishes are thrown away upon her, and champagne makes her head ache. She will have only coffee, black and bitter.

Was she sea-sick Mr. Longworth inquires, of course. Wretchedly, mademoiselle responds with pathos, unable to lift her head all the way. She kept her berth from the first day to the last, and there were times when death would have been a relief. Mr. Longworth expresses his sympathy and regret; he allows as all men do under the benign influence of dinner, he would never suspect, he murmurs, from her present appearance that she had been ill an instant. As she kept her cabin all the way over, she did not meet a friend of his who also crossed, a lady, a Miss Hariott.

"I met no one, monsieur, no one. But my sister knows the lady. Petite, it is the lady so kind, of whom you have often told me."

Mr. Longworth glances with the nearest approach to attention he has yet shown towards the silent sister. A pair of very fine eyes met his remarkably fine he decides, quite

different from the golden orbs of the other, but in their darker way quite as attractive.

"I know Mees Hariott very well," responds Mlle. Reine. "More, monsieur, I also know *you*."

She looks at him with that sudden smile which makes so bright and vivid a change in the dark quiet of her face as to lend it momentarily almost beauty. But it is a beauty quite unlike her sister's, of soul and expression, not of pearly flesh and rosy blood.

"Am I indeed so fortunate? But cordial friend of mine as I know Miss Hariott to be, how could she reconcile it to her conscience to bore a perfect stranger with my manifold perfections?"

"She did not bore me. She and a young gentleman bored one another. He seemed to know you very well also. His name was Dexter."

"What, Frank?"

"Yes, Monsieur Frank. It was Mees Hariott's daily habit to hold you up as a model of all perfection for Monsieur Frank to imitate. They were the only people I knew on board, and as I was always with them, your name grew a very familiar sound indeed."

"How happy am I," says Longworth, "to possess a friend who, not content with appreciating me herself, sings my praises across the broad Atlantic. But do you know where she and Dexter are stopping? for no doubt they will put up at the same hotel."

No, mademoiselle does not know. She has seen and bidden Mees Hariott good-bye, knowing they would soon meet in Baymouth, but their destination in New York she has not learned. They linger long over dessert. When they arise, Mr. Longworth proposes their coming and taking a bird's-eye view of the city a little later—New York by gas-light is worth looking at.

The young ladies assent, and all depart. They go every

where they can go, and see everything they can see, in the space of a couple of hours, and still it is early when they return.

"Will you come to the opera this evening?" their escort inquires. "It is not very warm, and the opera is the ever-charming 'Figlia.'"

"We have no costume, monsieur," says Mlle. Marie, glancing deprecatingly at her gray serge robe, the straight, clinging, classic folds of which have pleased Longworth's artistic eye from the first. "And papa is not yet three months dead," says Mlle. Reine in a very low voice.

"I beg your pardon," says Longworth. "I quite forgot that."

And then he wonders for the first time why these girls are not in black.

"Papa told us not to put on mourning," says Marie, as if answering that thought; "he always considered it a useless form. He knew it was the heart that mourns, not the garments."

"And we were too poor to buy it," adds, with simplicity, Mlle. Reine; "but though we do not wear crape and sables, we cannot go to the opera, monsieur."

"No, certainly not. But where, then, shall I take you?" says Longworth, feeling somewhat like the bewildered gentleman who was presented with a white elephant. "There are many other places —"

"I think it would be best to go nowhere to-night," answers Marie; "we are tired, and you cannot be troubled with us always. We will go to our rooms and retire early."

Mr. Longworth protests, of course, that it is no trouble, that it is a pleasure, etc., but feels immeasurably relieved all the same. As they are about to part Mlle. Reine asks him a question.

"We go to Brymouth to-morrow?"

"To-morrow, unless you wish to remain another day and see the city."

"Oh, no! we desire to have no wish in the matter. You know madame, my grandmother?"

"Intimately, mademoiselle."

She hesitates, and looks at him wistfully. Yes, uncommonly fine eyes Longworth thinks again, eyes of which the white is almost blue, and the brown almost black.

"Will she be kind to us, monsieur?"

It is an embarrassing question. With that earnest crystal-clear gaze on his face, it is impossible even to equivocate.

"I hope so," he answers slowly, "after a little—I think so. But you must be considerate with her, and wait."

"Good-night," she says, and both bow simultaneously and depart.

"Poor little thing!" he thinks, touched as he remembers that wistful look. "I wish madame, our grandmother, were not made of quite such Spartan stuff. I fancy the little one—petite Reine—will feel it most. Now, if I could only hunt up Dexter."

He starts out, determined to drop in at two or three hotels. He is more fortunate than he expects, for in the doorway of the second he encounters his man.

Frank is standing whistling, his hands in his pockets, his eyes on the street, when Longworth approaches and slaps him on the shoulder.

"What, my Frank! What, my Baby! (Mr. Dexter's sobriquet in times past, from his vast length of limb and breadth of shoulder, has been the Baby) "have I run you to earth at last? Bless the boy, how well he is looking."

"Longworth, by Jupiter!" exclaims Frank, grasping his hand, "who'd have thought it? Awfully glad to see you all the same. What do you mean by hunting me down? You haven't been looking for me, have you?"

"For the last three hours, my boy. I know you crossed in the Hesperia. Is Miss Hariott here?"

"Oh, she told you," says Frank. It is quite characteristic of Mr. Dexter to make this remark in good faith without pausing to think how she can have done it, not knowing he was on board, until after they had started. "Yes, she's here, but I don't think you can see her to-night; she was dead tired and went to bed early. But I say, old boy, how uncommonly glad I am to meet you. How are they all in Baymouth? How is Totty?"

"Blooming and lovely, and plumper than when you left."

"Is she? Do you know, I like plump women. How is my Polly?"

"Your Polly is well, and as uncivil as ever. A more d's-reputable old bird never talked. O'Sullivan has taught her to swear in Irish."

"Ha, ha!" laughs Frank. "How is that exiled Irish prince? I am going down to Baymouth for a week or two—going to have a yacht built."

"Where is Trumps?" asked Longworth. "You didn't leave him in Europe, did you, a present to one of the crowned heads?"

"Not likely. Here, Trumps." Frank whistles, and the big Newfoundland comes lumbering up, and recognizes Longworth with demonstrative doggish delight.

"I'd like to fetch a dog down to Totty," says Dexter; "she told me once she would like a King Charles—they had an aristocratic sound, she said, and I know a little woolly fellow she could carry in her pocket. Do you think she would like it?"

Among Mr. Dexter's pet habits, and their name is legion, is a great and absorbing passion for animals. Down at home, in the Georgian Mansion, he keeps a perfect menagerie, from small white mice, to great black dogs, cows, and horses. If a hippopotamus or an elephant were easy trifles to get or

keep, a hippopotamus and an elephant Frank would have. His first impulse, when he desires to render himself agreeable to a young lady, is to give her a dog, just as any other gentleman's would be to present her with a bouquet.

"Tot might," responds Longworth, "but her mother wouldn't; she abhors the canine race. A dog followed O'Sullivan home once; stray curs always have a draggle-tailed habit of following the O'Sullivan. He was about the ugliest beast that ever wore a tail at one end, and a bark at the other. He had only one eye and three legs—was such a hopeless and forlorn spectacle that O. named him (from some association of ideas, with a certain lost cause) 'Head Center,' on the spot. I think the name blighted him, as a bad name will blight any of us. Although he grew round and fat, and lazy and luxurious, the moment there was no possibility of his ever growing fatter or fuller he disappeared, vanished, evaporated, made himself thin air, and never was heard of more. O'Sullivan always had suspicions of Mrs. Longworth and the cook, for he was of thievish propensities (the dog I mean, not O'Sullivan), and made away with everything he could lay his paws on. But I always attribute it to his name. As a consistent Head Center, he could not have acted otherwise."

"It may have been consistent Head Center nature," retorts Dexter, "to take all he could get, and rob his benefactors, but it wasn't consistent dog nature. I'll bring the King Charles down to Tot all the same."

"What kind of trip did you have, Baby? A good run and nice people?"

"A spanking run and a splendid crowd of fellow-creatures. There was one young lady—awfully jolly little girl, with whom Miss Hariott struck up an intimacy. I wish I could find her again—never had a chance to say good-by even."

"What was her name?"

"Mademoiselle Reine."

"What was her other name?"

"I don't know. We got on with that. She was French, and that eminently convenient word, *mademoiselle*, supplied all deficiencies."

"But her friends —"

"Had none. Traveled in charge of the captain. Papa and mamma dead. There was a sister whom nobody saw—she appeared to have taken the veil—but with whom I wanted to fall in love. Wouldn't give me a chance though. Shut herself up in her room all the way."

"Pretty, Baby?"

"Must have been, with that figure, that air, that hair, that voice. Didn't see her face, but know it was stunning."

"And the other one?"

"Well she was charming, with the eyes and smile of an angel, but not what some people—you, for instance—would call exactly handsome, you know. Miss Hariott fraternized with her as she doesn't often with strangers."

"If Miss Hariott liked her, all is said; her judgment is next door to infallible. I presume you and Miss Hariott bored this unfortunate young person with perpetual talk of Baymouth?"

"Well, yes, naturally, we talked of Baymouth a good deal."

"And of Baymouth people?"

"Of some of 'em—you, for instance."

"Ah! Did you ever by any chance speak of Mrs. Windsor?"

"Mrs. Windsor?—the empress in her own right, who used to curdle the blood in my youthful veins whenever she said, 'Good morning, Master Frank,' in that deep, Siddons voice of hers? No, I don't think we ever spoke of Mrs. Windsor. Why?"

"Nothing," Longworth answers, with a peculiar smile. He is thinking of this reticent little dark-eyed *mademoiselle*,

sitting so demurely while they discussed Baymouth, and never dropping a hint that she, too, was going there.

"What has brought you to New York, Larry?" inquires Dexter. "*Phenix* business, I suppose. How is that noble literary bird?"

"In full feather, pluming himself for fresh flights. Yes, *Phenix* business has brought me, and as it is satisfactorily concluded, I shall return to-morrow. Suppose you come along."

"Can't. Promised Miss Hariott to do escort duty, and she is going to stay a week. I want to stay, myself. Who knows but that I may meet my 'little ladies' some fine afternoon among the other belles of Broadway?"

"So far gone as that, dear boy? Well, the night wears apace, and I'll be off. So, until we meet at Philippi, adieu."

"I'll walk with you. Where are you staying? At your old quarters, I suppose. What train do you take to-morrow? If I have nothing better to do I'll come and see you off."

"No, don't trouble," says Longworth; "we'll see enough of each other soon. How long did you tell me you meant to stay in Baymouth?"

"Only a week or two, to arrange the contract about the yacht, then 'away down South in George.' My mother and the governor pine for the light of my ingenuous countenance once more. But I shall return again before the summer ends."

Mr. Longworth holds out his hand.

"Well, good-by, my Baby—here we are. Best love to Miss Hariott of course. Take good care of her; existence in Baymouth would be a bore without her."

"Tell you what, Larry," says Frank—"I've often thought it, too—you ought to marry Miss Hariott. She would suit you to the finest fibre of your nature, as I've read somewhere. And though she's a trifle too old —"

"Not a day too old. I asked her once, and she said no. Bless you, my Baby, and good-night."

He waves his hand, and disappears; Frank turns to retrace his steps, in a musing mood.

"Asked her once, and she said no! Wonder if he did, though. He's such a one to chaff; but it would be exactly like him. Oh, if some beneficent fairy, some modern Asmodeus, would but unroof New York, and show me where my 'little ladies' are at this moment!"

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. WINDSOR AT HOME.

THE ten o'clock express next morning bears away among its passengers Mr. Laurence Longworth and his two young ladies. Mlle. Marie sits serene in her loveliness at one of the windows—Mlle. Reine sits beside her. That lovely stretch of country that lies between New York and Boston looks its loveliest this genial summer morning, and the dark eyes of Reine, weary of restless, tossing blue water for so many days and nights, gaze as though they could never gaze their fill. It interests Mlle. Landelle, but not to the same extent; she can look at her fellow-travelers, glance over the illustrated papers, and converse with monsieur. Monsieur sits opposite; to him the route and the sunlit landscape are very old stories. He lies back and watches as steadfastly as is consistent with good breeding the fair flower-face before him. It is a face upon which it is a perpetual pleasure to gaze; its youthful freshness, its perfection of feature and coloring, look as often as you may, seem ever new. Most beautiful faces are marked by some

flaw, however trifling ; Longworth, no mean judge, examining critically, can find none here. Many men glance in passing, pause for a second as if struck, then glance again. If she notices, her unconsciousness is something perfect—if she were blind she could not be more outwardly indifferent to it all. It appears to Mr. Longworth that she accepts this eye homage with the tranquillity of one to whom it is such an old story that it has ceased to embarrass, as something she had been accustomed to from her very cradle, and so has ceased almost to observe it.

She talks well, Longworth finds, in a soft, rather slow voice, and is a good listener. She has spent nearly all her life in London, it appears, but has visited more than once, Paris, Versailles, and Rouen. Beyond France she has never been ; but Reine has been up the Rhine, and in the Tyrol, and once spent Holy Week in Rome with her aunt, who brought her up and took her everywhere. Longworth, upon this, glances at the petite figure, and dusk face, and still eyes of brooding darkness.

"And, in spite of all this foreign travel, she leaves the onus of the conversation upon us. Or is it that she thinks it too trivial to join ? How silent you are, mademoiselle."

"Reine holds her tongue in four different languages," says Marie, with a smile, and a caressing touch ; "she is a wonderful linguist and musician, is *la petite*. She speaks English and French, reads German, and sings in Italian."

"And yet she has not condescended to make half a dozen remarks in any language, living or dead, for the past three hours."

"You and Marie do it so well, monsieur, it would be a pity to interrupt. And I am always stupid when traveling. Besides I was thinking."

"A self-evident fact. If one only could read those thoughts——"

"They would not interest you at all, monsieur."

Monsieur is not sure of that, but he does not say so. She has the head and brow of one who thinks more than she talks, and is a young lady whose thoughts and opinions on most subjects might be worth hearing.

"I met a friend of yours, mademoiselle," he says, still addressing himself to the younger sister, "last night, after we parted. He is lingering a whole week in New York, in the hope of encountering two young ladies who crossed with him, and whom he calls 'my little ladies.' He is desolated at having missed them on landing, and if he only knew their name would search every hotel register in the city to find them."

"Ah! Monsieur Frank," laughs Reine; "yes, we missed each other that last day. But he never saw Marie."

"Which does not hinder him from being excessively anxious to do so. Mademoiselle, you are a wonderful young lady. You hear these two people talking perpetually of Baymouth for ten long days, and never once drop a hint that you are going there yourself."

Mademoiselle lifts her eyebrows.

"But why, monsieur—why should I? How could it possibly interest them? And though extremely kind they were yet strangers, and we do not tell strangers our family history, and where we are going, and all our biography. Why should I have told?"

"Mademoiselle, I repeat, you are an extraordinary young lady. The average American girl would have taken Miss Hariott into her confidence the moment the name of Baymouth passed her lips, retailed her own history, and found out everything there was to find, concerning Mrs. Windsor and her future home. You do not speak one word. I congratulate myself on the pleasure of knowing a heroine who can profoundly keep her own secrets."

"Ah! now you are laughing at me. And indeed, I was, and am anxious to know." A troubled look creeps into the

wistful eyes fixed upon him. "Do you tell us, monsieur—you know her well—what is our grandmother like?"

"Like a queen, mademoiselle, if queens are always stately and tall, handsome, and high-bred; severe perhaps, cold certainly, but a lady to her finger-tips."

"*Une grande dame*—I said so, Petite," murmurs Marie.

"Cold and severe, and we are coming uninvited and unwelcome," Reine responds, under her breath.

"But to the home that is ours by right, the only home we have in all the world," says Marie, and a look of resolution that is not unlike Mrs. Windsor's own, sets her young face; "it is our right to go there, my sister."

"So!" Longworth thinks, "in spite of your pretty face you have a will of your own, and are a much better diplomat than petite Reine. I foresee if madame melt at all it will be toward you."

Mr. Longworth on the whole decidedly enjoys this day's ride and companionship, although he is not so fascinated that he cannot desert them at intervals for a brief retreat to the smoking-car. Among all the enchantresses that ever turned the heads of men was there ever one yet who had not a formidable rival in her lover's cigar-case?

They dine together in very friendly fashion at two: Mademoiselle Marie manifests that admirable appetite which perfect health, beauty, and twenty sunny years require; but Reine's flaps, she takes little, she looks restless, and nervous, and excited. This expression deepens as the afternoon wears on; Longworth sees it in the large eyes that glance up at him upon one of his returns from smoking. Marie, angelic almost in her slumber, has made a pillow of her shawl, removed her hat, and sleeps—a lovely vision. Reine lifts a warning finger.

"Sh! monsieur, she sleeps. She is not accustomed to railway travel, and it fatigues her."

She looks with loving eyes at that fair, sweet, sleeping

face. Longworth looks, too, with the admiration he cannot quite hide in his eyes. What a model she would make, he thinks, for a sleeping beauty; how some artistic Bohemians he wots of in New York would rave of that wondrous chevelure of red gold, those long, amber eyelashes, that faint, delicate flush on the waxen skin!

"It is a pity," he says, "but I am afraid we must. In five minutes we change cars for Baymouth."

A flicker of fear passes over her face, and he sees it with a touch of compassion for this nervous, sensitive child.

"The other will be the better off," he thinks; "this poor little creature is to be pitied."

"How long before we reach Baymouth, monsieur?" Reine inquires.

"We will be there at six; it is now half-past four. Here is the junction; they are slowing already. Pray wake your sister, mademoiselle, while I collect our goods and chattels."

"Marie, *m'amour*," Reine whispers, and Marie opens wide her lovely eyes.

"Are we there?" she asks, stifling a yawn.

Reine explains.

"Change cars for Baymouth!" shouts the conductor; and preceded by Longworth the two French girls go, and presently find themselves in another train, and flying along in another direction on the last stage of their journey home.

From this moment Reine does not speak; she looks cold and pale, and is trembling with suppressed nervous excitement. Marie sits tranquil and serene, the faint flush of sleep yet on her cheeks, a smile on her lips, a starry light in her eyes, talking brightly, and without a tremor.

"Yes," thinks Longworth for the third time, "*you* will do. I fancy you were the one who wrote that remarkably cool letter. But for this petite Reine—

'Alas! poor princess, to thy piteous moan
Heaven send sweet peace.'

MRS. WINDSOR AT HOME.

This excitable nature of yours will work you woe in Mrs. Windsor's stern household."

The train stops at last. As all the fierce steam-whistles of the Baymouth mills and factories shriek forth the welcome hour of six, and disgorge their swarming hives, they enter a ~~hall~~ and are driven away to the Stone House.

"Monsieur, are you not coming with us?" Reine asks, clinging to him instinctively, and looking at him with eyes all black and wide with vague terror.

"I will go to the door," Longworth answers, kindly. "My dear Mademoiselle Reine, do not be nervous about this business. As your sister says, you are only going to your rightful home."

She makes no reply; her small face is absolutely colorless as she shrinks away into a corner of the carriage. No more is said, but a sense of kindly compassion fills Longworth; it is of her he thinks as they drive along through the familiar Baymouth streets, not of the lovely, serene Marie. And now they are at the gate, and grim and gray, and still and stern as its mistress, the Stone House rises before them, half hidden in trees, with the red light of the sunset on its small-paned windows.

"We are here," says Longworth, somewhat superfluously. He springs out, assists them to follow, precedes them to the door, lifts the knocker, and sends a reverberating echo through the house.

"And now I will say good-by and good-speed until we meet again."

He shakes hands cordially with both, and as the heavy hall-door opens, disappears. The rather elderly woman who admits them looks at them with curious eyes.

"Be you missis's granddaughters?" she asks; "the young ladies from France?"

Marie bows with a smile.

"Then you are to walk right in; missis will be with you in a minute."

She opens the door of a reception-room, handsome and costly in every appointment, but with the chill air of a state apartment not often used. They are not more than a moment here when the door opens and their grandmother is before them.

So stately, so severe, so cold, so calm, so royal.

Marie has seen a queen more than once, but a queen who did not look half so unapproachable as this lady with the silver hair and smileless face. But Marie Landelle is not easily frightened, she has known the power of that magical face of hers too long to doubt its potency here. She goes up with both arms outstretched, and touches lightly, and quickly, and gracefully first one cheek and then the other.

"Grandmamma," she says softly, and tears flash into the lovely eyes, "we have come."

Neither by word nor sign does Mrs. Windsor reply. She submits to the caress with just a gleam of scorn passing across her face, and her eyes rest on that other smaller, darker, less fair, and more shrinking form.

"Reine," Marie says, "come, Petite."

She comes forward and bows very low. Mrs. Windsor holds out her hand, and Reine lifts it and touches it with her pale lips. Then grandmamma speaks for the first time.

"You are like your mother," she says, looking full at Marie, and there is not a particle of emotion in face or voice, "only very much handsomer. You are like——"

"I am like my father," Reine answers, and if there is a ring of defiance in her tone, it is involuntary and unpremeditated.

"I never saw your father," Mrs. Windsor responds, and the eyes that rest on Reine are full of chill displeasure. "Mr. Longworth"—she turns to the elder sister as she says it—"came with you, of course?"

"To the door, madame. He has been most kind and attentive all the way."

"Mr. Longworth could not be otherwise."

She rings a bell, and a second and more youthful woman servant appears.

"Show these young ladies to their rooms, Catherine, and wait upon them. Are you too fatigued to come down stairs again this evening? If so, Catherine will fetch you whatever you may desire to your rooms."

"We will come down, madame, with your permission," answers Marie.

"Very well. I dine at three. Early hours best agree with me, I find. I take tea at seven. It is now half-past six—sufficient time for you to change your dress. Your trunks shall be taken up at once. You will hear the bell at seven."

She motions to Catherine to lead the way. Both young ladies make a sliding obeisance in passing, which she returns with a stately bend. A court reception could hardly be more formal or ceremonious, and all the way upstairs Marie is laughing softly to herself.

"*Ma foi!*" she thinks; "but that is a grand old lady—a grandmamma to be proud of! Poor mamma! how utterly unlike she was! A fine house, too, carpets like velvets, pictures, statuary, satin hangings, mirrors, everything one likes most. We were wise to come."

Their rooms, when they reach them, adjoin each other, are spacious and tasteful. The French beds, tucked up all white and tight, look tempting. Here, too, are pretty pictures, lace draperies, mirrors, gilt vases, and fragrant flowers.

"Ah! this is charming, is it not, *Petite?*" cries Marie, in French; "and the grandmother an empress, my faith! This is different from the Islington lodgings, and our one grimy bedroom in the three-pair back. Did I not say it was well to come?"

"We were not interlopers at Islington," Reine responds curtly; "the grimy lodgings were home. I cannot

breathe in this house. I feel as though I were in a prison."

"You will outgrow all that," says the philosophical Marie. "Our aunt has brought you up badly, Retite. Here are the boxes. What shall we wear? Black, I suppose. I saw the eagle eye of grandmamma fixed on our poor gray serge—and it is an eagle eye, keen, sidelong, piercing. As we have only one black dress each, we cannot easily be at a loss. That, at least, is a comfort."

She laughs as she says it. Her sister looks at her almost enviously.

"Would anything put you out, Marie, I wonder?"

"Not a fine house, a dignified grandmamma in rep silk and chantilly lace, and a speedy prospect of high tea at least. How will you ever get through the world where every trifle has power to make you miserable?"

"Not very well, I am afraid," Reine sighs. "Send away this woman, Marie; see how she stares. We do not want her."

With a few dulcet words, Catherine is dismissed, and descends to the kitchen to extol to the skies the beauty and sweetness of the tall young lady. The little one is too dark and foreign-like, Catherine sapiently opines, has no pretty looks to speak of, and isn't no way so pleasant-spoken as the pretty one.

They dress—Marie in a tolerably new black silk, Reine in a by no means new grenadine. But both dresses in make and fit show French skill and taste, and both dress their hair in the prevailing mode, which, by some rare chance, happens to be a becoming one.

"I shall not wear a scrap of color anywhere," says Marie, as she fastens a cravat of black lace at her white throat; "it will not do to shock grandmamma's prejudices the very first evening."

She does not need color. The black silk sets off the fair

face, the lovely bright hair is brilliance sufficient. She needs neither ribbon, nor flower, nor jewel, to enhance her perfect beauty, and she knows it.

"I shall wear what I always wear," says Reine, and when the grenadine is on, takes from one of the bouquets two deep crimson roses, and fastens one in her breast, the other over her left ear, and lights herself up effectively in a second.

The supper bell rings as she turns from the glass, and they go down stairs. Catherine awaits them in the lower hall, and ushers them into that particular apartment, where Longworth was the other night received, and where Mrs. Windsor always takes tea. One brief, comprehensive glance she gives them, and there is a slight compression of the lips as she sees the red roses. But she makes no comment; she points to their seats, and takes her place to preside. Marie's places complacently over the well-appointed table; young ladies, as a rule, are the farthest possible from epicures; Mlle. Landelle is an exception. Quantity she may not care for, quality she certainly does; first-rate dinners and perfect cookery she has not always been used to, but she knows both, and can appreciate both when she gets them.

Out of consideration for their exhausting day of travel, the table is abundantly and substantially spread, and at the head of her own table Mrs. Windsor, even to her unwelcome granddaughters, is almost gracious. People said this lady had "charming manners," was a "perfect hostess," and they said right. Even the enemy who broke her bread, and ate her salt, became worthy of consideration for the time. But when the meal ended and she arose, she slowly but surely froze again. She sat down, her ringed hands crossed in her lap, and watched her granddaughters as they moved about the room. There was a piano in a corner, and Marie opened it, and ran her fingers over the keys with a skilled touch. Reine stood at one of the windows, and watched the

sweet summer twilight falling, and the sweet summer stars come out.

"There are one or two things I would like to say to you, young ladies," Mrs. Windsor begins at last, and low as her voice is, it seems to jar on the stillness; "but perhaps it is almost too soon to speak to-night. It is always best to come to a perfect understanding as speedily as may be; it saves possible unpleasantness in the future. But if you wish I will defer what I have to say until to-morrow."

"Whatever you wish, dear madame," Marie is gently beginning, when Reine turns suddenly from the window.

"Madame is right," she says, a ring of decision, scarcely to be expected, in her tone; "it is always best to know precisely how we stand at once. We do not wish you to defer, on our account, anything you may have to say until to-morrow."

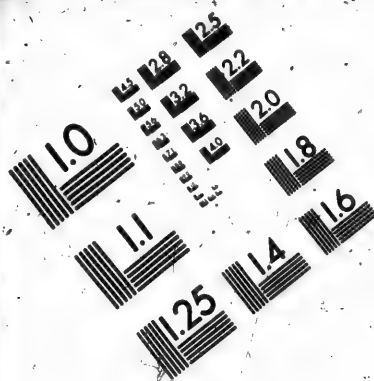
"Very well." She looks surprised and slightly displeased at the abrupt interruption. "If you will leave that window, and sit down, all I have to say can be said in a very few minutes."

Reine obeys. Marie takes a low rocker, Reine seats herself in Longworth's especial arm-chair, her small face looking white and still in the faint pale dusk.

"I need not tell you," begins Mrs. Windsor in her very coldest voice, "that when your mother eloped with your father, she was discarded from this house at once and forever. I need not tell you that she wrote me many letters imploring pardon and—money. I need not tell you those letters, one and all, were consigned to the fire, and never answered. All this you know. When your father wrote of his wife's death, it did not move me. I neither grieved for her, nor regretted her. I had cast her out of my heart many years before; she had been dead to me from the hour she became Monsieur Landelle's wife. When, later, you informed me of his death, it did not as a matter of course concern me at all.







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But when still later, young ladies, you wrote announcing your intention of coming here, it became necessary to take some decisive step. You merely said you were coming, and you gave no address to which I could write to prevent that coming. Still I took decisive measures—the first being to make my will."

She pauses. The dusk is deepening in the room, the three figures sit motionless, the low, harsh voice of the speaker alone breaks the twilight silence. Marie sits, one hand over her eyes; Reine sits, both hands clenched hard and fast in her lap, as one might in the mute agony of physical pain, her eyes gleaming in the semi-darkness.

"I am a very rich woman," pursues Mrs. Windsor, "there are few richer in the State to-day. I made my will, and I bequeathed every dollar of that wealth which has been accumulating in the Windsor family for nearly one hundred years to the only human being on earth I greatly care for, the gentleman who brought you here, Mr. Laurence Longworth. Why I care for him you need not know—the fact remains. My will is made, and at my death all that I possess is bequeathed to him."

She pauses again. Still profound silence, and in an instant she goes on.

"The second step I proposed taking was, to go to New York, meet you there upon the landing of the *Hesperia*, pay your return passage, and send you back, settling an annuity on each sufficient at least to keep you from want. That was my fixed resolve. But before going, I sent for Mr. Longworth, and told him of my plans, showed him your letter, and informed him he was my heir."

Every few minutes Mrs. Windsor pauses, and in these pauses Reine can hear the beating of her own angry, rebellious, passionate heart.

"Mr. Longworth is a man of men, a gentleman of high honor and spotless integrity—he refused to accept the fortune

offered him. He so positively refuses it, that it becomes necessary for me to think of some other disposition of it. That, however, is a question for the future. I told him also of my intention of sending you back, and found him so resolutely opposed to it, that I was forced to give it up. He pleaded your right to come here so forcibly, that at last I yielded to his judgment. But I am only stating the simple truth, in stating that you owe it entirely to him your being here now—that these doors ever opened to receive your father's daughters. To Mr. Longworth's high sense of honor and right, you owe whatever gratitude may be due for the home I give you—not to me."

Once again a pause. In the creeping dark Marie still shades her eyes—in Longworth's own chair Reine sits, with bitter hatred of Longworth rising and swelling in her heart.

"What I intend to do for you," pursues Mrs. Windsor, "is easily told. Being my daughter's daughters, and having received you, I feel it due to myself and my position to receive you becomingly. I shall present you to the best society of Baymouth at a reception next week; I shall settle upon you a yearly income, to be paid in quarterly installments, in advance, sufficient to enable you to dress well, and as becomes my granddaughters, without troubling me. Your first installment will be paid you to-morrow; and, remember, I shall expect your wardrobe at all times to do me credit. Beyond that you will be in all things your own mistresses, free to come and go, to mingle in society here, and to make friends. Punctuality at meals I shall expect, of course. This is all I have to say. I have spoken plainly, but plain speaking is always best, and the subject need never be renewed. I look for neither gratitude nor affection—I need hardly say I do not expect to give it. And now, as you must be fatigued after your day's traveling, I will detain you no longer. We understand each other. Is there anything you have to say before you go?"

Both young ladies rise, and stand silently for a brief instant. Then Marie speaks.

"Nothing, madame," she says in a very low voice. "I wish you good-night."

"Good-night," briefly responds Mrs. Windsor.

Reine does not speak at all. She bows in passing, and receives a bend of the haughty head, and so they pass out of the darkening sitting-room into the hall. The gas is lit here. As they go upstairs they hear Mrs. Windsor ringing for lights—she does not like that haunted hour, twilight.

In their rooms, too, the gas is burning, and turned low. As Reine shuts the door, both sisters face each other in that pallid light.

"Well!" says Marie, drawing a long breath; "that is over! It was like a douche of ice-water on a winter morning. And to think that but for the blond monsieur with the cold eyes, we would have been sent back in the next ship! *Mon Dieu!*"

"Marie!" Reine cries, pale with passion, her eyes afire, her dark hand clenched; "I hate that man!"

"I do not," says Marie coolly; "I thank him with all my heart. That high sense of honor of yours, monsieur, is eminently convenient. Thanks, Mr. Laurence Longworth, for favors past, present, and to come!"

She sweeps him a mocking courtesy, then throws herself on her bed.

"I need not mind crushing my black silk," she says, laughing—"my one poor five-and-sixpenny silk—to-morrow our first quarter's allowance is to be paid. Oh, how sleepy I am!—lectures are always sleepy things. Reine, Petite, get rid of that tragic face, and let us go to bed."

"To think," Reine says, in a stifled voice, passionate tears in her eyes, "that but for that man, that utter stranger, we would have been sent back like beggars, that but for his

pleading we would have been scorned and spurned! Oh! I hate him, I hate him!"

"I always said the aunt did not bring you up well, Petite. It is very wicked to hate any one. And the blond monsieur is not an utter stranger to our gentle grandmamma at least—did she not say he was the only being on earth she cared for. And once more I kiss his lordship's hand for the good he has done."

"Marie," Reine impetuously bursts forth, "I wish, I wish, I wish we had never come! I did not want to come. I would rather work my fingers to the bone than have dainties flung to me like a dog. Oh! why did you write that letter? Why did we ever come here?"

"Because it was wise to write, and well to come. Listen here, Petite." She lifts herself on her elbow and the gas-light falls across the white loveliness of her face. "It is very fine to talk of working one's fingers to the bone, but I could not do it, and would not if I could. I am young and pretty, I like silk dresses and soft beds, handsome rooms, and good dinners, servants to wait on me, and a fine house to live in. All these we are to have—all these we have a right to. I do not thank madame the grandmother, nor monsieur the friend—no, not that! It is our right and our due. Don't you remember what poor Leonce used to say—'Man has a sovereign right to all he can get.' For all these good things we take a few cold looks, a few harsh words, and even these time will change. Go to bed, Petite, and never say again you hate Monsieur Longworth."

"Good-night," Reine says, and goes at once. "Sleep well, my angel," cheerily responds Marie, and then the door between the rooms closes, and each is alone.

Marie goes to bed, and to sleep, but long after that beauty sleep has begun, and she lies in her darkened chamber, a vision of slumbering loveliness, and sweetness, and youth, Reine kneels by her open window, trying to still the tumult

tuous beating of her undisciplined heart, trying to banish hatred, ill-will, and all uncharitableness toward this stranger, and look at things calmly and reasonably like Marie. But she is neither calm nor reasonable, and it is very long before she can crush down all that sinful anger and rebellion. Tears fall hotly and swiftly from between the fingers that hide her face, broken murmurs of prayer fall from her lips; something about strength for the accomplishing of "*ta volonté suprême, O, Dieu notre Père,*" and with prayer comes peace. The one Friend who never refuses to hear, call when and where they will, the cry of sorrowing human souls for help, sends help and comfort both, and as she kneels the tears cease, and the starlight falls like a benediction on the bowed dark head.

CHAPTER VIII.

BEFORE.

FRANK, my dear," says Miss Hariott, "this is growing monotonous. I thought a week of New York essential to my happiness, but I find three days a great abundance. This perpetual, never-ceasing stream of men and women rushing up and down Broadway, as if it were what they came into the world for, is dazing me. The din and crash of the streets are beginning to bewilder me. If you would not see me a hopeless maniac on your hands, Frank, take me home, I conjure you."

Miss Hariott makes this speech at the hotel breakfast-table, where she and Frank sit alone. The window at which they sit fronts on Broadway, and the usual ebb and flow of humanity that pours up and down that great artery of the city's throbbing heart, at half-past nine of a fine May morning, is

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at its height. Mr. Dexter, whose matutinal appetite and spirits are excellent as usual, protests that he lives but to obey, that the faintest of Miss Hariott's wishes are to him as the "firman" of the Sultan to a true believer, and that although up to the present he has cherished the hope of encountering the "little ladies," he now at last resigns it as a hope all too bright and good to be realized.

"And I know that girl with the veil was pretty," says Frank, pathetically ; "it is hard lines after devoting myself as I did, all the way across, to Mademoiselle Reine, to part at last and forever without so much as one good-by. But such are the floorers of fate."

"How do you know you have parted forever ?" says Miss Hariott. "I don't countenance betting as a rule, but I am willing to wager a box of gloves—number six and three-quarters—shades dark-browns and grays—that before you are a week older you will have met again the "little ladies."

"Done !" cries Mr. Dexter, and producing book and pencil on the spot, gravely enters the bet : "six and three-quarters, dark browns and grays. Miss Hariott, if you have their New York address, let us go up and call upon them at once. I shall never breathe easily until I have fulfilled my destiny and fallen in love with that girl with the golden hair."

"Frank, I wonder if all young men are as hopelessly idiotic as you are, with your perpetual talk of falling in love. As if great hobblederoys of two-and-twenty could know what the word meant. No, my precious boy, this is our last day in the city, and you are to take me to Greenwood and Prospect Park. That will occupy the day. We will get back to a six-o'clock dinner, and then we are going to see 'Rip Van Winkle.' And by to-morrow morning's earliest express we will shake the wicked dust of Gotham off our wandering feet and go back to Baymouth, fair Baymouth, peaceful Baymouth, sadder and wiser beings for all this foreign gadding."

"But you said——"

"Never mind what I said. Pay attention to what I am saying now."

"You said I would meet my little ladies——"

"Mr. Dexter, I am on my way to my apartment to put on my bonnet for our excursion. You are to stand at this door and wait for me until I come down, and on penalty of the eternal loss of my friendship, you are not so much as to name any ladies, little or large, in my hearing for the rest of the day."

Upon which Miss Hariott "sweeps" out of the room, and Frank sighs and resigns himself to his destiny. Presently she reappears; they hail an omnibus, and go rattling off to one of the ferries, to begin this last day's sight-seeing.

It is a long, warm, sunny day. Frank forgets his troubles and enjoys it, looks at all the handsome vaults, and monuments, and mausoleums with the complacent feeling that he is on the right side of them. Late in the mellow afternoon they return, and the programme is gone through, dinner, Booth's; and the last day in New York is at an end. Next morning sees them on the train, and next evening sees them safely back in Baymouth.

"Dear dirty New England town!" murmurs Miss Hariott, as she lies back in the cab and watches with contented eyes the flitting, familiar landscape; "dear disagreeable North Baymouth, I salute you! Frank, I would insist upon your coming home and stopping with me during your stay, only I know it would bore you to death, and that you would ever so much rather go to Mrs. Longworth's."

"Well, you see," says Frank, "Larry's there and the rest of the fellows, and I always stop there, and it would put you out horribly to have a great fellow like me knocking about your little doll's house. Thanks all the same, Miss Hariott. It's awfully jolly to be with you—shouldn't wish for better company all my life—but it *would* put you out, you know."

"And put you out a great deal more," laughs Miss Hariott:

"I understand, Master Frank. Give my regards to Mr. Longworth; tell him to come and see me as soon as he can; and for you—show your gratitude for all the care I have taken of you since we met in the Hesperia by dropping in every day."

They shake hands and part. Miss Hariott's home is a cottage, many streets removed from either Mrs. Longworth's or the Stone House—a tiny, two-story cottage, with honeysuckle and Virginia creeper, and all sorts of climbing things in front, and grape-vines, and thrifty peach and plum trees in the rear.

A doll's house, as Frank has said, with a big bay window bulging out of one end, filled with roses, and fuchsias and rich geraniums. A house "too small to live in, and too big to hang to your watch-chain," as Longworth quotes, but amply large for Miss Hariott and her one handmaiden; large enough, too, for Longworth himself to be luxuriously lazy in, many a time and oft. The one servant, a tall, thin, beautifully neat and intelligent mulatto woman, opens the door to her mistress, at sight of whom her whole yellow face lights and glows.

"Well, Candace," Miss Hariott says, holding out her hand, "home again, you see. Ah! we don't need the old song to tell us there is no place like it. How good it seems to see the dear little house and your familiar face. And how are you, and how are the birds, and the flowers, and everything, and everybody?"

"Everything and everybody are well," Candace answers, smiling jubilantly all over her face, and "bless the Lord that missis is back safe and sound. And Mass Larry, missis, he's been here every day a' most to look after the garden and see that it was fixed as you liked. And there's a big bookay in the parlor now, missis, that he sent an hour ago, 'cause he said there was no knowin' what arternoon you'd come. And tea's ready, missis, and jest as soon as I help

fetch in these trunks, I'll bring in the things. And bless the good Lord, missis, that you's back again. It's been powerful lonesome now, I tell yer, since you went, and Mass Larry, missis, he say so too."

Miss Hariott goes into the pretty parlor, with its lace curtains, and delicate adornments, its piano and well-filled music-rack, its tables strewn with all the latest books and magazines, and on a little stand Longworth's big bouquet. She glances at it and smiles—it is like him to think of her, and send this to welcome her. Everything in the room is associated in some way with him; these books and periodicals are from him; she is his reviewer sometimes when he is in a merciful mood; that sunny Southern landscape over the mantel is his gift; there is his favorite place at that open, lace-draped window, where through so many long, warm, summer evenings, through so many blustering winter nights, he has sat and talked, or read, or listened in a waking dream to her music—her true and good friend from first to last. And there is no one in all the world quite so dear to her as this friend. He is the sort of man to whom many women give love, not alone the love of which poets sing, and novelists write, as if human hearts held no other, but friendship strong, and tender, and true, all the nobler and more lasting, perhaps, because utterly unblended with passion.

While Miss Hariott sits in her cosy home, and sips her tea in the light of the sunset, Frank Dexter is dining with the boarders, and retailing his adventures by land and sea. They are interested in these adventures, but far more interested in an event which is to come off the day after to-morrow. Mrs. Windsor—everybody there is profoundly interested in Mrs. Windsor—Mrs. Windsor's granddaughters have arrived from Europe, and on the evening but one from this they are to be presented to Baymouth in form. They have been at the Stone House for four days, but no one has seen them yet, it would appear, except Longworth. Longworth

met them in New York, Longworth escorted them home and has spent two evenings in their society, and Longworth has been plied with questions on all sides since, with breathless interest and eagerness. Are they pretty? But Mary Windsor's daughters, cry out the elders of the party, must of necessity be that, and then the Frenchman was said to be an uncommonly handsome man. That old, half forgotten story has cropped up from the dust and ashes of the past, and Mary Windsor's romance of one-and-twenty years ago has rung the changes over and over during these four days, at every dinner-table of note in the town. And did Mrs. Windsor send for these girls, and are they to be her heirs, and are they really handsome, and are they thoroughly French, and do they talk broken English, and will everybody Mrs. Windsor knows get cards? There is a flutter of expectation through Baymouth, and Mr. Longworth of the *Phenix*, the only man who can enlighten them, awakes all at once and finds himself famous.

He takes the breathless questions that beset him in his customary phlegmatic way, smokes and listens, and laughs a little, and drops a few syllables that are as oil to the fire of curiosity.

Frank Dexter pricks up his ears as he listens, with an interest quite as great as that of those around him.

"Came four days ago, and landed at New York. The *Hesperia* landed four days ago at New York. What vessel did they cross in, Longworth?"

"The *Hesperia*," responds Mr. Longworth, placidly, helping himself to mint sauce.

"By George!" cries Dexter with an energy that makes his hearers jump, "that is what Miss Hariott meant when she bet the gloves. Mrs. Windsor's granddaughters are my Little Ladies."

Explanations are demanded and given. Dexter is excited, "Are their names Reine and Marie?" he demands of Longworth.

"Marie and Reine—Marie is the elder. Calm yourself, my Baby," says the unemotional Longworth; "this sort of thing is eminently detrimental to the proper exercise of the digestive organs."

"Hang the digestive organs! Is Mlle. Reine small and dark, with splendid brown eyes, very white teeth, a delightful smile, and just the faintest foreign accent?"

"All these good and pleasant gifts Mlle. Reine rejoices in, my Baby. Splendid eyes, as you say, large, dark, luminous, with a sunny smile in them. And there are so few eyes that smile. Now for the other."

"Ah! I never saw the other. She kept her cabin all the way, and I only had a glimpse of her veiled. But I have had a conviction from the first that she must be stunningly pretty."

"Stunningly is hardly an adverb of sufficient force when applied to Mademoiselle Landelle. She is the prettiest woman I ever saw. It isn't a question of eyes, or nose or complexion, or hair or shape—though these are all about perfect, I should say; beauty and grace encircle her as a halo, she walks in them, they surround her as an atmosphere. Everything she does, or looks, or says, is graceful; and when she neither does, nor looks, or says at all, she is, if possible, more graceful still. In short, Mlle. Marie Landelle is one of those masterpieces of creation which refuse to be described, which must be seen to be believed in."

All this glowing eulogium Mr. Longworth pronounces in a tone devoid of every particle of earthly emotion, with a face guiltless of the faintest trace of admiration or enthusiasm. He goes placidly on with his dinner as he talks, and passes his plate for another help of peas as he concludes. Mrs. Longworth laughs shortly as she returns the plate.

"Are you in love with her, Laurence? I never heard you so enthusiastic about any one before."

"Did you not?" says Longworth. "I thought you had."

His eyes lift from the peas, and fix first on her and then on her daughter. "I remember I used to bore you with my rhapsodies long ago; but a man who runs a dally and weekly *Phoenix* has hardly time for ~~that~~ sort of thing."

"You couldn't do better, Longworth," says Mr. Beckwith: "each of these girls will get a million and a half. And if she's the beauty you say, it would pay better than the *Phoenix*. A fellow like you owes a duty to society—he ought to marry and settle."

"And faith it's a settler, I'm told, most men find it," murmurs O'Sullivan in his corner.

"It's something every man of thirty owes to his country," pursues the speaker, who is himself a full decade over that golden age, and a bridegroom of barely two months' standing.

"Thirty-one and a half," lazily responds the editor.

"It's something no fellow can understand," says Mr. O'Sullivan, still pianissimo, "why men, when they run into the matrimonial noose themselves, are so eager to drag their fellow-mortals into it. It's the old principle that misery loves company, I suppose."

"At thirty-two every man should be, as St. Paul says, the husband of one wife——"

"I beg your pardon, St. Paul never said anything of the sort."

"He said every bishop should be the husband of one wife——"

"Longworth's not a bishop," interrupts Frank, "so the text doesn't apply."

"In such high feather as you are with the old woman, too, it would be the easiest thing in the world for you to go in and win——"

"Don't call Mrs. Windsor the old woman, Beckwith; she wouldn't like it. No more do I," cuts in Longworth, and, disgusted with all these interruptions, Mr. Beckwith relapses into his dinner.

"And when is the party? to-morrow night?" inquires Frank. "How many of you have invitations?"

No one has an invitation, it would appear, except Mrs. Longworth and Mrs. Sheldon. Personally Mrs. Windsor likes neither of these ladies; but they are connections of Longworth's, and as such are bidden. The boarders do not belong to that inner circle who visit at the Stone House. Longworth being the house-friend of madame herself, his invitation goes without saying.

"I wish I had a card," Frank says plaintively. "I used to be on the Windsor visiting-list. I wonder if she knew——"

"I think I may venture to take you, Baby," says Longworth, as they rise from the table, "though it is an act of wanton cruelty to expose that too susceptible heart of yours to the battery of Mlle. Marie's dazzling charms. Even if you do go clean out of your senses at sight, promise to try and restrain yourself for this first evening, for my sake, won't you?"

Frank is ready to promise anything. They go on the piazza, seat themselves, produce cigars, and light up. The women flutter about them, and Mrs. Sheldon, in a dress of palest blue, against which her plump shoulders glisten white and firm as marble, takes a hassock at Longworth's side, and looks up at him.

"Is she really so pretty, Laurence—so very, very pretty?"

He glances down at her. The warm after-glow of sunset is flushing sky, and sea, and shore—it flushes too for the moment Laura Sheldon's milk-white skin, or else she colors under the steadfast look of Longworth's eyes.

"Totty, when you don't wear white you should always wear blue. Very sweet thing, that, in the way of dresses. What may its name be?"

"What nonsense! This dress pretty? Why, it is only my old blue Japanese silk."

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"How old?"

"Oh! ages and ages. I got it last summer."

"Ages and ages, and she got it last summer! What are you going to wear to the party, Totty?"

"Pink," says Mrs. Sheldon, and her face dimples and smiles, and she clasps two rosy-ringed hands on his knee and looks up into his face with infantile blue eyes. "Salmon pink, that lovely delicate shade, and my pearl necklace. Are you going to dance? You don't always, you know."

"I know—my unfortunate chronic laziness. I look upon dancing as so much idiotically violent exertion for no particular result. But I intend to do myself the pleasure of waltzing with you. We always had each other's step, you remember, Totty."

Mrs. Sheldon's heart gives one great sudden beat. Remember! Does she not? What Laura Sheldon nine years ago threw from her as she might a soiled glove, she would give a year—yes, full half her life—to win back now. She removes her hands suddenly, and there is silence. Longworth puffs serenely, apparently profoundly, unconscious of the result of his words. It is the lady, however, who speaks first.

"But all this is not an answer to my question," she says. "Is Mademoiselle Landelle so very, very pretty, Larry?"

"The prettiest girl I ever saw in my life," is the prompt and uncompromising answer.

She bites her lips. For little Mrs. Beckwith, the bride, has approached, and enjoys her discomfiture.

"Is she dark or fair?"

"Fair, of course. Did I ever admire dark women?"

"The question is," says Mrs. Beckwith, pertly, "did Mr. Longworth at any period of his career admire any woman dark or fair, even for one day?"

"Have I ever made any secret of my admiration for the ladies of this household? As far as my friendship for Beck-

with has permitted me to show it, have I ever made any secret of my admiration for——”

“Oh, nonsense! But really and truly, ever so long ago, when you were quite a young man, for I don't pretend to call thirty-two young, did you ever seriously admire any woman, fair or dark—in the way of falling in love with her, I mean? Because I believe, Mr. Longworth, you belong to the cold-blooded kingdom, and couldn't fall in love if you tried.”

“Half-past seven,” says Longworth, looking at his watch. “Miss Hariott has come, and I must call upon her. Totty, you knew me when I was quite a young man—tell Mrs. Beckwith how I used to lose my head for blonde beauties in that fossil period. I haven't time, Ladies, I go, and leave my character behind me.”

Longworth approaches Frank, who, at the other end of the stoop, is renewing his acquaintance with his friend Polly. Polly turns from him at sight of a more familiar face.

“You'll come to grief, Larry! Nom du diable! Sacré-ré bleu! You're a fool, Larry! You're a fool! you're a fool!”

“There never was such a vituperative old virago,” says Longworth, looking affectionately at Polly, who sits with her head on one side, and her black eyes upon him.

“Come with me to Miss Hariott's, Baby. She's used up, I dare say, after her day's ride; still I want to see her, if only for a moment.”

He links his arm in Frank's, and they go up the street together under the eyes of the boarders.

“Lucky man, that Longworth,” says Mr. Beckwith; “one of those fellows born with a silver spoon in their mouths.”

“Don't seem to see it,” retorts Mr. O'Sullivan. “He hasn't converted the spoon into specie yet, at last. The *Phynix* is all very well, and pays perhaps; but it isn't a fortune, and never will be.”

“I don't mean the *Phynix*. I mean these French girls.

Sure to marry one of 'em, and come into a whole pot of money when the grandma dies. Awfully sweet on him, the grandma."

"Isn't it a thousand pities she doesn't take him herself, then, and have done with it."

"A man may not marry his grandmother," says Mr. Beck with gravely, "but he may marry her granddaughter. Then he can hand the *Phenix* over to you, O'Sullivan, and fancy it after-dinner all the rest of his life."

"I have just been telling Mr. Longworth, Harry, that I do not believe he ever was in love in his life," says vivacious Mrs. Beckwith, "and he refers me to Mrs. Sheldon for proof."

"And what says Mrs. Sheldon, my dear?"

"Nothing—which is suspicious. A little bird whispered to me the other day that he once was in love with Mistress Totty herself. I begin to believe it."

"And we always return to our first love," says Mr. Beckwith. "And smoldering flames are easily rekindled."

"But the hardest things on earth to relight are dead ashes," says his wife under her breath.

Mrs. Sheldon hears, and rises suddenly and leaves the group.

"Doesn't it strike you, ladies and gentlemen, that this discourse is the last in the world in bad taste?" suggests Mr. O'Sullivan. "Mrs. Sheldon heard that stage aside of yours, ma'am. Suppose we let Longworth and his love affairs alone, Beckwith. He lets ours, you may take your oath."

He certainly was at that moment. Still smoking, his arm through Frank's, he walks slowly along the quiet streets in the gray of the summer evening. The young factory ladies, dressed in their best, are sauntering by, each on the arm of her sweetheart; pianos tinkle here and there through the silvery dusk, stars of light begin to gleam behind closed blinds.

The trees stand, green, motionless sentinels; wafts of mignonette greet them, the bay spreads away into the shimmering far off line of sky, and stars pierce the hazy blue. It is an hour that has its charm for Longworth, and in which his silent familiar takes possession of him; but Frank is inclined to talk.

"What an odd fish you are, Larry," he is saying, in an injured tone. "Why couldn't you tell me that night in New York, that these young ladies were with you? I spoke to you about them. You must have known who I meant."

"Don't talk to me now, that's a good fellow. I never can thoroughly enjoy a cigar and talk, and this is capital. Shut your mouth with one!

"You know I don't smoke; that is why you are so uncommonly generous. I consider it a beastly habit—a man making a funnel of himself. There I was hunting New York, like an amateur detective, three whole blessed days, and all the time those girls were here."

"Baby, let me alone. Let me forget there is a woman, young or old, in the scheme of the universe, for five minutes, if I can."

"Yes, that is so likely, and you going hot-foot to visit one. You would not even let me come to see you off that morning, because they were with you. You may think this friendly if you like, but I don't."

"Frank," says Longworth, removing his cigar and looking darkly at him, "if you don't hold your tongue I'll throw something at you."

Frank's grumbling subsides; he is heard for a moment or two muttering about dogs in the manger, and the beastly selfishness of some people; but this dies away, and profound silence befitting the hour and the editor's humor falls upon them. They are some twenty minutes in reaching Miss Hariott's cottage, where lights shine cheerily, and whence merry music comes. Miss Hariott rises from her piano,

not at all too tired to greet and welcome the two gentlemen.

"It is good to see you home again, Miss Hester," Longworth says, throwing himself into a big chair, a genial look in his eyes. "Whenever, during your absence, I felt particularly dead tired and despondent, when subscribers refused to pay, when all the world was hollow, and life a dreary mockery, I used to come here and sit in this chair, and have in Candace, and talk of you. I used to fetch your letters here to read. I don't say doing this was altogether satisfactory, but it was the best that could be done under the circumstances."

"Don't believe a word of it, Miss Hariott," interposes Frank. "A greater humbug than Longworth never lived. Instead of spooning here with Candace, and weeping over your letters, he was in Mrs. Windsor's back parlor drinking tea. I never thought it of you, Larry; but you are turning out a regular tame cat. Beckwith—though a fool in a general way—was correct in his remarks at dinner to-day, by George! If a fellow doesn't marry, and give half-a-dozen hostages to fortune before he's thirty, he's certain to develop into a tame cat."

"Then let us trust you will act up to those noble sentiments, Baby, and present your first hostage to fortune, in the shape of a wife, as soon as may be. Though, at the same time, the rôle of tame cat is by no means to be despised. Do you put in an appearance at Mrs. Windsor's 'small and early' on Thursday night, Miss Hariott?"

"I have a card. Yes, I think so. Frank, don't forget those gloves—six and three-quarters——"

"Dark browns and grays. Oh, I'll not forget, although I think it was awfully unhandsome of you, Miss Hariott, to keep me in the dark. I don't so much mind Longworth—it's like his selfishness; but I wouldn't have expected it of you. How long have you known who they were?"

"Do you remember that night when she refused to sing in the saloon of the Hesperia, but said she hoped to sing for us yet? It flashed upon me at that moment."

"By Jove! what it is to be clever. But then my head was always made of wood—never had a blessed thing to flash upon me in my life, give you my word. Longworth says the one I didn't see and wanted to see is a gem of the first water. In fact, as he raves so much about her beauty, and as his talent for domestic fiction is so well known, I begin to believe she is pock-marked. Did you see her?"

"I had a glimpse of her that last day, in saying good-by, and I did not notice any pock-marks. It is as well, however, to take Larry's enthusiasm with a pinch of salt. A poet in the past is apt to be rhapsodical in the present."

"Don't allude to the poetry, I implore," says Longworth. It is really one of the few vulnerable places in his armor, that by-gone volume of Shelley-and-water. Miss Hariott possesses a copy, and holds it over him in perpetual *terrorem*.

"Miss Hariott," says Frank, "I searched every book store in New York for a copy of Larry's poems—oh, good lud, poems!—and I give you my honor I couldn't find one. Now, you have the book, I believe. Look here!—all ladies like diamonds—I'll give you the handsomest diamond ring in Tiffany's for that book."

"If she does," says Longworth, "I'll have your blood with the bootjack before you sleep to-night."

"I managed to get a copy of his novel," pursues young Dexter—"Fire and Flint." *That* wasn't hard to get, bless you! The publisher issued five hundred for the first edition—thought he had got hold of a New York Dumas *filz*—told me so—and he has four hundred and seventy-five on his shelves to this day. That was seven years ago. You had better think it over, Miss Hariott; no one will ever make you such an offer again—the handsomest solitaire in Tiffany's for Longworth's poems!"

"Thank you. I'll think of it," responds the lady. "It is a pity the gifted author couldn't have sold them all at the same price. Laurence, tell me how you like our two young ladies from France?"

"One of them is not from France. Barring the slight drawback of having been born in Paris, and having had a French father, she is, to all intents and purposes, an English girl. She has lived in London all her life."

"And the other in Rouen. She told me that, although she was wonderfully reticent about herself. Think of the little brown-eyed pussy sitting there so demurely day after day, listening to Frank and I discoursing Baymouth, and never dropping a hint that she was going there."

Longworth laughs slightly.

"She is a young person who can keep her own secret if she has any to keep, and hold her own with the stately grandmother. I don't think Mlle. Reine and Madame Windsor will hit it off well. Mlle. Marie is far wiser in her generation than the little one."

"I can't like Mrs. Windsor," says Miss Hariott, impetuously; "I can't forgive her for being so flinty to that poor daughter of hers. How dare she leave her in poverty—because she ran away with the man she loved? I suppose poor Mary Windsor did die poor?"

"Madame Landelle certainly died poor—extremely poor, from what I can learn. Marie is communicative enough. Landelle taught French and music—mamma was always ailing—who ever knew an American matron who was not always ailing?—her doctor's bills so ran away with poor Landelle's earnings that they were perpetually in debt, perpetually receiving notices to quit from indignant landladies. I can infer, too, that poor mamma was fretful and fractious, eternally bewailing the luxury of the past and the misery of the present. I think that unlucky Hippolyte Landelle must have realized the dismal truth of the proverb about marrying in

haste and repenting at leisure. I think he fully expiated his sin of running away with an heiress. But she is dead now, rest her soul, and on the whole Madame Windsor is disposed to act generously towards her granddaughters."

"Is she disposed to act kindly?" inquired Miss Hariott, abruptly.

"Well you know, indiscriminate kindness is not one of the weaknesses of her nature. In her own way, and if they will let her, I think she is."

"What do you mean by if they will let her?"

"If they are like Uriah Heep, 'umble, if they humor her, if they take pains to please——"

"If they cringe, if they fawn, if they toady—bah! I have no patience with the woman, nor with you either, Larry, when you defend her."

"Come, now, Miss Hariott, don't let your feelings carry you away. She *is* kind. Does not this party look like it?"

"This party is for her own sake, not theirs. I am the greatest lady in the land; it is due to me that my granddaughters are received into the very best circles of this manufacturing New England town. Having received them, a slight shown to them is a slight shown to me. I do not like them—they are intruders; but I am Mrs Windsor, of the *Strone* House, and nobility obliges. Therefore, they shall be presented to awe-stricken and admiring Baymouth in a grand *coup de théâtre* on Thursday night." Don't let us talk about it; I have no patience with the woman, I repeat."

"So I perceive. I think it would be better and more like you, Miss Hariott, if you had. She is a profoundly disappointed woman—disappointed in her ambition, her love, and her pride. And it is not your *métier* to be hard on the absent."

"Thank you, Larry," says Miss Hariott, and holds out her hand. "You *are* a friend. Come, what shall I play for

you? Here is one of Chopin's marvels in two dozen flats, and no end of double sharps—will you have that?"

They linger long, and Candace brings in tea and transparent biscuits. Longworth is "tame cat" enough to like tea, and sips the cup she gives him with relish. They fall to gossiping about new books, until Frank, whom literature very naturally bores, yawns drearily, and brings the eye of his hostess upon him.

"Take that child home and put him to bed," she says to Longworth. "We might have known it was dreadfully indiscreet to allow a boy of his tender age to sit up until a quarter of eleven. Good-night, Franky; good-night, Larry, and thank you for everything."

They go home to the white house facing the bay, all ashine in the light of the young June moon, and Frank springs up to bed whistling "My Love is but a Lassie yet." He would like to dream of his Little Ladies, he thinks, but neither the dark, dreamy-eyed Reine, nor the girl with the golden hair, visit his sound slumbers all night.

CHAPTER IX.

NOBLESSE OBLIGE.

THE evening comes. There is flutter and pleasant tumult in many Baymouth homes, as maids and matrons, sons and fathers array themselves for Mrs. Windsor's grand field night. It is a radiant summer night, sweet and starlit, scented with the odor of dewy roses and mignonette, a perfect night for youth, and gladness, and feasting and making merry.

After considerable rumination in which she has ignored

the young ladies and taken counsel of Longworth, Mrs. Windsor has decided that it shall be a dancing party. Not an absolute ball—the word implies too much—but something supposed to be friendly and informal, with a sit-down supper, cards, and conversation for the elders, unlimited dancing and flirtation for the young ones. She had thought of a dinner-party at first, but heavy dinner-parties were not favorably regarded in Baymouth; and when Mrs. Windsor did open her house, she honestly wished to please her guests. To maintain her own dignity was of course always the first essential; but that maintained, why, then, everybody must go home delighted.

Longworth, too, who knew Baymouth tastes, pronounced in favor of the dance; so a dance it was to be, with a band and a supper from Boston.

Of all who stood before their mirrors and arrayed themselves sumptuously, not one young beauty of them was in a more feverish flutter than Frank Dexter. An irresistible and ridiculous longing to see his goddess described by Longworth was upon him. He would be glad to meet Mlle. Reine once more, of course, and see those deep, dusk eyes light into sunshine as she welcomed him; but that other, that unseen sister—it was of her he thought as he dressed. He grew hot and angry in the struggle with buttons and collars, and cuffs, and studs, and neck-ties, and gloves, before the glass. Never had he labored so hard, never had he been so disgusted with the result. Certainly it was not a handsome face Frank saw, and the genial boyish jollity that was his principal attraction was sadly marred by an anxious scowl to-night. But he finishes at last, and, flushed and heated, goes down to wait for Longworth.

Waiting for Longworth is, if possible, a more trying ordeal than dressing. Longworth has gone back to the office after dinner in his customary cold-blooded and unexcitable manner, remarking casually that he may be late, as there is a broad

side of vituperation to be poured into a brother editor, in next morning's edition, but will endeavor for Frank's sake to slaughter the enemy in as brief a space as possible. Nine comes, and there is no Longworth. A quarter past, and Mrs. Totty Sheldon, dazzling in the salmon pink and pearl necklace—an old *gage d'amour* of Longworth's, by the way—her large, beautiful arms, and plump polished shoulders sparkling in the gas-light, sails in.

"Will I do, Frank? Do you like my dress? Are you coming?"

"Can't, unfortunately, yet awhile—waiting for Longworth. Impossible for me to go without him, you know. Your dress is ravishing, Totty—you are bound to be the beauty of the ball.

"No hope of that, I fear. You forget Larry's description of Miss Landelle. Only I wonder if he meant it. Well, *au revoir* for the present."

She gathers up her rich train, and takes his arm to the cab waiting at the door. Mamma in a golden brown silk that has seen some service, follows, and they drive off. Frank paces up and down the stoop, growling inaudible anathemas upon Longworth lingering over his imbecile newspaper paragraphs—for no other reason, Frank is convinced, than to exasperate him into a brain fever. But all things end, and presently the laggard comes, the red tip of his cigar announcing his approach afar off, with his usual leisurely and deliberate step. No human being can recall the phenomenon of seeing the editor of the *Phoenix* in a hurry.

"Dressed, my Baby?" he says, springing up the steps; "hope I haven't kept you waiting, dear boy."

"But you have kept me waiting," growls Frank; "perhaps you don't happen to know it is ten minutes of ten. What poor devil of an editor were you pitching into to-night? He appears to have taken a great deal of killing. You must have been enjoying yourself abusing somebody, or you never would have scribbled until this time of night."

Longworth does not wait for these reproaches—he runs up to his room, and sets about his toilet with celerity and dispatch.

“Awful nonsense,” he says, as Dexter, still rather huffy, follows, “obliging a man, because you ask him out to enjoy himself, to undergo the torture of putting himself inside a sable-tail coat, and nether garments first. This gray suit is new, and neat, well-fitting, and comfortable; but it would be a deadly sin against the ordinances of society to go in it to Mrs. Windsor’s to-night. I am a wiser, happier, and better man in it than I am in the regulation white tie and swallow-tail.”

But when the white tie is tied, and the swallow-tail on, Dexter has his doubts about it. Certainly Longworth looks well, as most tall, fair men do, in full evening dress—no detail wanting, even to the tiny bouquet for the button-hole, one tuberose and a sprig of heliotrope.

“He isn’t half a bad-looking fellow when he likes,” Frank thinks, moodily. “I suppose that is why the women all like him. For lots of women like him and always have; and I suppose, as Beckwith suggests, he’ll go in for Mrs. Windsor’s heiress, and win her too.”

The thought is depressing, and in gloomy silence Frank sets out by his side at last. But Longworth is inclined to talk, for a wonder, and does talk, although Dexter’s replies are sulky monosyllables. A sense of strong personal injury weighs upon this young gentleman—a sense he would have found it difficult to explain, as if Longworth’s undeniable good looks and unexceptional get-up were matters of secret personal wrong and insult.

“You seem a trifle depressed and low-spirited, to-night, dear,” he doesn’t you,” suggests Mr. Longworth, cheerfully, “as if you had a secret sorrow preying upon you. Or perhaps it’s bile—it struck me you were looking yellow at dinner. Or, perhaps it’s a presentiment of coming evil—the sort

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of thing people have in books, when the lady of their love is going to elope with another fellow. If it is a presentiment, my Baby, it is not yet too late. Yonder is Mrs. Windsor's—say but the word, and across that fatal threshold you shall never pass."

"Bosh!" returns Mr. Dexter, with suppressed savagery; "for a man most people seem to think sensible, you can talk more horrid nonsense than any fellow alive. I suppose I may have my silent fits too, although I am not the editor of a two-penny newspaper. Now, for Heaven's sake, don't let us have any more of your chaff, for here we are."

Here they were certainly. Every window aglow, its long gray front all alight, many carriages in a line before the gate, peals of dance music coming through the open door, the grim Stone House may wonder if "I be I" to-night. They enter a little room where other men are assembled, and do as these men are doing—give hair, and tie, and vest, and gloves one last adjustment, give mustaches one last loving twirl, then pass out and on to the drawing-room, where Mrs. Windsor is receiving her friends.

"Courage, my Frank," says Mr. Longworth; "we will only see grandmamma this first heat. The ball-room, where the Demoiselles Landelle, it is to be presumed, are tripping the light fantastic toe, is farther on. In poor George Windsor's time it was a billiard room, but tables and balls went long ago, and the floor is waxed, and the heir of all this is food for fishes. So the glory of the world passes away—come on."

"Upon my word, you *are* a cheerful spirit, Longworth," says Frank, in disgust. "Wait one moment. I say, who is that beside her?"

"Yes, my Baby, pause and look. Many moons may wax and wane before you behold anything else one-half so lovely. There she stands—queen, lily, and rose in one—Mademoiselle Marie Landelle."

In a large chair Mrs. Windsor is seated, beautifully and perfectly dressed, more uplifted, more majestic, more awful, it seems to Frank, than ever before. A little group surrounds her, a tall young lady stands by her side. At this young lady he looks, and with that first look forgets there is another human being in the house, in the world. He stands and gazes, and falls there and then abruptly, and hopelessly, and helplessly, and irretrievably in love on the spot.

"Oh, heavens!" he says below his breath, "what a perfectly dazzling beauty!"

"Ah!" says Longworth. "I told you so. I see she has knocked you over; but restrain yourself, my Baby. Calm that frenzied fire I see in your eye, and come and be introduced. Be brave and fear not; if you ask her prettily, I dare say she'll even dance with you."

He moves on, and Frank follows, but in a dazed way. He is vaguely conscious that the tall young beauty is dressed in floating, gauzy, translucent white, all puffs and bunches, and trailing yards behind her. He sees, as in a dream, tiny clusters of violets all over it, a large cluster on her breast, a bouquet of white roses and violets in her hand, and still another knot in her hair. He has never seen such hair; it falls in a rippling shower, in a crinkling sunburst to her slim waist, and yet it is banded, and braided, and twisted in a wondrous combination on her head, at the same time. What a lot of it she must have, Dexter thinks, still dazed; and what a stunning color! and were ever any of the fair dead women of long ago, for whom worlds were lost, and conquerors went mad, and heroes gave up honor and life, one-half so lovely?

All this time they are slowly approaching "the presence," and, in a dreamy way, Frank is conscious that Longworth is talking.

"I knew it would be a floorer," that gentleman is remarking; "but not such a floorer as this. She's uncommonly

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pretty, there can be no doubt—looks like the 'Blessed Damozel,' or as Andersen's 'Little Sea-Maid' must, when she got rid of her fish-tail and danced before the prince. Still, allowing for all that, your attack is awfully sudden. Try and get rid of that sleep-walking look, Baby, or, when you are presented, Miss Landelle may be pardoned for thinking I have in charge an able-bodied young lunatic."

Frank is conscious that his admiration is perhaps a trifle too patent, and pulls his wits together by an effort. They are in "the presence" now, and Mrs. Windsor has always had the refreshing effect of an iced shower-bath upon Mr. Dexter's nerves. She pauses in her conversation, and the old pleased and softened light comes into her cold, turquoise-blue eyes.

"You are late," she says, graciously ; "I have been watching for you. That tiresome office, I suppose ?"

Mr. Longworth apologizes. Yes, it is the office. He bows to Mlle. Marie, who greets him with a bewitching smile, and draws forward Frank.

"You remember my young kinsman, Frank Dexter, Mrs. Windsor ? He is visiting Baymouth, and presuming upon your old friendship for him, I have taken the liberty of bringing him to-night."

Mrs. Windsor's welcome is dignified cordiality itself. Yes, she remembers Mr. Frank very well. Any friend Mr. Longworth may bring is welcome for Mr. Longworth's sake, but Mr. Frank is welcome for his own. Then she turns to the brilliant young beauty at her elbow and says : "My granddaughter, Miss Landelle, Mr. Dexter."

"Mr. Dexter and I are very old acquaintances, grandmother," says Miss Landelle, smiling ; "or at least we came near being. We crossed in the same steamer."

"Indeed."

"And he and Reine know each other like old friends. I kept my berth all the way, and knew nobody. She will be very pleased to meet you again, Mr. Dexter."

Frank murmurs something—the pleasure is his—aw—hopes Mademoiselle Reine is quite well—um—trusts Miss Landelle has quite got over her *mal-de-mer*. He is not usually at a loss in young ladies' society; his words generally flow freely and fluently enough, but he is so visibly embarrassed stammering out this that Longworth compassionately comes to the rescue.

"Where is Mademoiselle Reine? In the ball-room, dancing, I suppose. You have not forgotten, I hope, Miss Landelle, that you yesterday promised me the first waltz?"

"Mr. Longworth, I wonder you have the audacity to speak of it. The first waltz, sir, is over."

"And I come late. Ah! unfortunate that I am, tied to the tread-mill of business and unable to break away. But surely there is a second—is not that a waltz they are beginning now. Pardon the past, and give me the second."

"Shall I, grandmamma?" she says, smiling. "Can you spare me?"

"Certainly, child. I have no intention of detaining you here all evening. Go and waltz, by all means."

"Come on, Frank," says Longworth, over his shoulder, as he bears off his radiant vision, "and say how do you do to Mademoiselle Reine."

Frank follows. Up to the present, Longworth has rather been one of his ideals—up to to-night he has been more or less "wrapped in the sweet and sudden passion of youth toward greatness in its elders;" but at this moment deadly emotions of rage, hatred, and revenge are stirring in his bosom. Yes, there can be no doubt of it—it is patent to the dullest observer, Longworth will win and wear this daughter of the gods, this queen rose of girlhood, this one of all the women of earth, he, Frank feels, that Fate has created for him.

But, in the ball-room, flooded with gas-light, filled with music, brilliant with beauteous ladies, these dark and direful

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musings pass. Mr. Dexter has fallen in love, suddenly it may be, but desperately, and gloom, and jealousy, and despair—Love's pleasant handmaidens—are gnawing already at his vitals. At the same time he is only three-and-twenty, is in a state of perfectly splendid vitality, is a tolerable dancer and immoderately fond of dancing, and the light returns to his eye, a thrill to his pulse, and he looks about him for a partner.

"Monsieur Frank!" says a voice. "Oh, it is—Monsieur Frank?"

He turns and sees a fairy in rose silk, rose and black, an artistic combination, roses in her dark hair, roses in her hand, a perfume of roses all about her, and with eyes like brown diamonds.

"Mademoiselle Reine."

She gives him her hand and smiles up in his eyes. He has thought often before—he thinks it again now—what a beautiful, sunny smile she has!

"Have you seen Marie and been introduced? But of course you have. Did I not tell you that night on the ship that we would meet again? Mees Hariott understood, she tells me, but you did not."

"You were terribly silent and mysterious, mademoiselle, and I never was a good one at mysteries. Are you engaged for this waltz, Mademoiselle Reine?"

"Monsieur, I never waltz—it is against my convictions; but the next is a quadrille, and I kept it for you—I knew you were coming—I knew you would ask me. Among all these strangers, not one of whom except Mees Hariott and M. Longworth I have ever seen before, you seem altogether like an old friend."

"Thank you, mademoiselle," he responds, with emotion. In his present blighted state it is something to hear words like these from the lips of Her sister. Ah! if She would but speak them. "I ask nothing better of fate than being my whole life long your friend," he says aloud.

Mlle. Reine opens her brown eyes for a second rather surprised. He does not see it ; his are following Longworth and a certain gauzy figure that seems to float in a white cloud, gyrating round and round.

"How beautiful your sister is," he is on the point of saying, but he bites his lips and stops. "Your sister does not resemble you at all," is what he does say.

"Oh, no ; she is a thousand times prettier. How well Monsieur Longworth waltzes ; one so seldom meets with a gentleman who can waltz really well."

"Longworth is a sort of Admirable Crichton, I find—what is there he does *not* do well !" retorts Frank, with bitterness, for with every praise of his rival the iron goes deeper and deeper into his soul. "I presume he and Mlle. Marie are friends for life already ?"

"I don't know what you mean by friends for life," says Reine ; "they are friendly enough for two people who have only known each other one short week."

"But there are some friendships that do not require time, but spring up full-grown in an hour !"

"Really !" thinks Mlle. Reine, "this is very odd. Has Monsieur Frank been dining late, I wonder ?"

They join the dancers as she thinks it. As a dancer Frank does not shine ; even as a dancer of square dances, his feet are in the way, and so is his partner's train. Mlle. Reine of course floats about like a Frenchwoman, and prevents him from upsetting himself and her. Longworth meandering by, still with the beauty of the night, nods encouragingly in passing, and *She* laughs. The laugh is at his awkward plunges, Mr. Dexter feels, and is the last drop of bitterness in his already brimming cup. Mrs. Sheldon, in the next set, goes by, and darts an angry glance at his rose-silk partner—the rose-pink and salmon-pink are swearing at each other horribly, the rose naturally having the best of it. It is evident she and Frank can sympathize on other grounds, for the look

she casts after Miss Landelle is almost as gloomy as Frank's own.

The hours of the night, set to music, sweet with flowers, bright with illumination, are danced away. Outside, under the stars and the trees, beyond the iron railing, groups of factory hands linger, and look, and listen; but as midnight approaches they flit away, and solitude wraps the dark and lonely street. Through it all Frank sees, and Mrs. Sheldon sees, and Miss Hariott sees, and Mrs. Windsor, slow to see, but seeing at last, that Mr. Longworth is devoting himself to Mlle. Marie as no one remembers ever to have seen him devote himself to any young lady before. Yes, Mrs. Sheldon remembers once—so long ago it seems—when he looked upon, and listened to her, as he is looking and listening to-night.

"Is he falling in love?" Miss Hariott wonders as she watches. "Well—why not? She is wonderfully pretty, too pretty almost. She will be very rich—it will please Mrs. Windsor—it is time he married, and she looks gentle and sweet. Why not?"

There seemed no "why not!" "Only I wish it were the other one," adds Miss Hariott, inconsequently, as Reine comes up to her, "she is dearer and sweeter, and better by far."

But Miss Hariott has no reason for judging thus, and so has to confess. Of the elder sister she knows nothing, except that beauty so rare and great rather prejudices her unfavorably than otherwise.

"She is too beautiful to be anything but silly, and shallow, and selfish, and vain," so illogically and rather uncharitably reasoned this impulsive lady. "Men fancy a beautiful soul must go with a beautiful face of necessity. I wish it were Reine. But, like all men, he is ready to pass the gold and take the glitter."

Once before supper Reine keeps the promise made on

shipboard, and sings for Miss Hariott. But as the rich, full, silvery contralto fills the long drawing-room, others flock in, surprised and eager. Miss Hariott is perhaps the most surprised of all—she can appreciate the beauty, and compass, and power of that deep, strong, sweet voice.

"My dear," she says in her amazement, "who would have deemed you could sing like this? Of course I knew from your face you could sing, but who was to tell me we had caged a nightingale? A finer contralto I never heard."

The girl glanced up, a flash of pleasure in her eyes.

"Yes, I can sing; it is my one gift—more precious to me than anything else in the world. Aunt Denise had the very best masters for me, and I studied hard. Not for drawing-room performances like this, you understand, but—for the stage."

"The stage!"

"Yes; that was the aim of my life, the operatic or lyric stage. Of course all that is at an end—for the present."

"For the present?"

Reine looks up again. She sees Mr. Longworth at Miss Hariott's side, and perhaps it is for his benefit that swift, dark flash gleams in her eyes.

"For the present. One day or other I shall realize my dreams and face the world for myself, and win my own way. I think there can be nothing in the world so sweet as the bread one works for and wins. Here is something you will like; shall I sing it?"

She sings again. Surely a fine voice is one of Heaven's best gifts—a gift to stir the heart beyond even the power of beauty. The loveliness of the elder sister is forgotten for the time even by Frank Dexter, in listening to the rich, ringing sweetness of the little dark girl who sings.

Supper comes. Still devoted, Mr. Longworth takes down the daughter of the house. Reine goes with Frank. And Madame Windsor, matchless in her easy grace as hostess,

sees, and a light slowly dawns upon her—a light that is pleasant and altogether new. Laurence Longworth has rejected her fortune, but as the husband of her granddaughter even his fastidious honor may take it and be satisfied. It will be a most judicious and excellent thing if he marries Marie.

The girl is certainly superbly handsome; even upon this cold and repellant grandmother that face worked its way. Her manners are what a young girl's manners should be—gentle, and yielding, and sweet. The other she does not like; she is cold, she is proud, she is repellant, she takes no pains to please. If young Dexter, who will be very rich, by any chance should fancy her, it will be a happy release. But for Longworth to marry Marie is the very best thing that can possibly happen.

"And if I tell her to marry him, of course she will; her inclination need have nothing to do with the matter, even supposing a possible lover in the past. And a girl as handsome as that is not likely to have reached the age of twenty without lovers. Still, having been brought up on French principles—convenient things French, principles—she will take her husband from the hand of her guardian when she is told, and make no demur. Yes, I am sincerely glad she is pretty and pleases Laurence."

They break up early; by three o'clock the last guest is gone. It has been a very bright and charming little reunion. Whatever Mrs. Windsor does she does well. She has presented her granddaughters to Baymouth society in a manner that reflects credit upon her and them. Miss Hariott kisses Reine as they part.

"Good-by, Little Queen," she says. "Come and see me to-morrow, and sing for me again. You sing like a seraph."

Frank and Longworth go as they came, together. Longworth is in excellent spirits still, and a cluster of violets has

taken the place of the tuberose in his button-hole, violets that an hour ago nestled in Marie Landelle's glistening hair.

"What thinkest thou, oh, silent Baby," he says, "of the girl with the angel's smile, and the angel's face, and the head for Greuze? Doth yonder moon, most gloomy youth, shine on anything else one-half so lovely?"

"Mrs. Windsor's champagne was heady, but you needn't have taken quite so much of it," is Frank's cold and scornful retort.

"Cynic! And the imputation is unjust, for it is the intoxication of peerless beauty and grace, not the vintage of *la veuve Cliquot*, that has turned my brain. Tell me, my Baby, what you think of her, and don't be sardonic. It pains me to hear a little thing like you talk in that grown-up way."

"You're a fool, Longworth!" says Frank, and wrenches his arm free. "And as she hasn't accepted you yet—for I suppose even your cheekiness wasn't equal to proposing to-night—I wouldn't be quite so cock-a-hoop about it, if I were you."

Longworth only laughs. He can afford to laugh; Dexter thinks, bitterly.

"Good-night, Baby," he says, in a friendly voice. "Try and get rid of that pain in your temper before morning."

Frank's response is sullen and brief. He goes up to his room and tosses for hours on his bed with the serene pink dawn smiling in upon him, and the songs of a hundred little birds sounding in the trees.

"I knew I would fall in love with her," he thinks with a groan; "but if I had known Longworth was to have her I would never have set foot in that house. I made a joke of it, by George, but it will be no joking matter to me all the rest of my life."

CHAPTER X.

AFTER.

IT is the middle of the afternoon. Miss Hariott, in garden gloves and hat, is busy among her rose-bushes and verbenas and heliotrope, and pruning, weeding, tying up. It is the day after the party, a soft, pale, sunless day, the gray sea melting into the fleecy gold-gray sky, and a pale, dim haze veiling the land. Miss Hariott hums a tune to herself as she works, when the click of the little garden gate reaches her, and looking up she sees Miss Landelle the younger. Miss Hariott drops basket and garden shears, and approaches to greet her guest.

"My dear mademoiselle——"

"My name is Reine," interrupts the young lady, with that brilliant smile of hers.

"And Reine is queen. Well, you looked like a Little Queen last night. You do always. I shall call you that."

"Go on with your work, madame," says Reine, dropping into a rustic chair, "and please don't flatter. Compliments and daylight never go well together. What a pretty garden—what a pretty little house this is."

"A doll's house, my dear, but big enough for one old maid and her waiting-woman. I am glad you have found me out, Little Queen; I was thinking of you as you came up."

"Thinking what?"

Miss Hariott smiles as she draws on her gloves, and resumes basket and scissors.

"I am afraid it would hardly do to tell you—just yet. It

might be premature," she answers, snipping away industriously, "but something pleasant all the same."

She has been thinking of her friend, Mr. Longworth, and Mrs. Windsor's second granddaughter, after the fashion of match-making women, but something in the pale, serious look of the young lady's face makes her realize that the association of ideas might not be agreeable.

Miss Hariott's snipping and clipping goes on, mademoiselle sits and looks at her, her hat in her lap, with tired, somber eyes.

"Little Queen," Miss Hariott says, suddenly pausing in her work, "how pale you are, how weary you look. What is it?"

"Am I pale? But that is nothing. I never have color. And I suppose I am tired after last night. I am not used to dissipation and late hours."

"Three o'clock is not so very late."

"It is for me. I have been brought up like a nun. Except when Aunt Denise took me two or three times to England, to visit papa, I hardly ever spent an evening out. At home, my music and my other studies, little birthday fêtes, and trips away with my aunt, filled all the hours. So I suppose very mild dissipation like that of last night tells."

"How is your sister to-day? Does she bear it better?"

"Much better; but Marie is used to it. She knew many people, very great people too, in London," Reine says, with a touch of sisterly pride, "and went out a great deal. Marie makes friends, go where she will."

"With that lovely face of hers, to make friends must indeed be easy."

"You think her lovely, madame?"

"Can there be any two opinions on that subject, my dear? I think it is the most beautiful face I ever saw out of a frame."

Mademoiselle smiles, and her dark eyes, not as brilliant

as usual this afternoon, light. Praise of her sister is evidently the short-cut to Reine Landelle's heart. No touch of envy for that superior loveliness, it is quite evident, mingles with the boundless admiration she feels for that elder sister.

"I think the angels must look like Marie," she says, quite simply, "with golden hair and yellow-brown eyes, as old Italian artists paint the Madonna. Mees Hariott, how happy you ought to be all by yourself in this pretty little house."

"Ought I? Most people's idea of happiness does not consist in being all by themselves in any kind of house. But you are right, petite Reine. I am happy. My life has had its drawbacks, many and great, but it has had its blessings, many and great also."

"The friendship of Monsieur Longworth chief among them, I suppose?" says mademoiselle, with a speaking shrug.

"The friendship of Mr. Longworth chief among them, my dear. You don't like Mr. Longworth."

"I know nothing about him," says Reine, a touch of scorn in her tone, "only that you all—all you ladies—seem to pet him, and do him honor, and consult him, and obey him. He is a very great personage in this little town, is he not? Not to know Monsieur Longworth is to argue one's self unknown."

"A very great personage?" repeats Miss Hariott. "Well, that depends upon your definition of greatness. He is a clever man, a sensible man, a *good* man. If these qualities constitute greatness, then he is great."

"How is he clever? What does he do?"

"Oh! innumerable things. He has written poetry," says Miss Hariott, with a repressed smile; "he has written a novel. And both have been hopeless failures, my dear. He delivers most eloquent lectures on occasion; he is editor and proprietor of the principal journal of Baymouth, and finally,

he is, and will continue to be, one of the rising men of the age."

"A triumphant knight of the goose-quill, in short, in the bloodless realms of pen and ink, without fear and without reproach!"

"Mademoiselle Reine, why do you dislike Mr. Longworth?"

"Mees Hariott, why do you like him? None of these things are any reason why. I think he is a meddler and a busybody—I think he is consulted by people old enough to know their own minds, and I think he impertinently sits and gives advice with a Jove-live loftiness from which there is no appeal. I have read Dickens, madame, and I think your learned and literary friend has molded himself upon Monsieur Pecksniff. Can you tell why Madame Windsor thinks him first and best of all the men in the world?"

Miss Hariott suspends work and looks at her. Some one else stands still and looks, and listens too, an auditor unseen and unbargained for. It is Longworth. Finding the garden-gate ajar as Reine left it, he enters and comes close upon them, unseen and unheard. If ever the temptation to play eavesdropper was strong enough to excuse the deed, it is surely strong enough here. "Let me see myself as others see me for once," he thinks, and coolly stands still and waits for Miss Hariott's reply.

"Why?" cries Reine Landelle; "tell me, if you can, why she, so haughty, so scornful, so imperious, should bow to his fiats as though he were a god?"

"Ah! that is it," Miss Hariott says to herself. She has ceased work altogether, and stands listening to this sudden outbreak in amaze. "My dear child, do you not know? Have you never heard the name of George Windsor?"

"Often. He was mamma's brother, and was drowned. I wish he had not been, with all my heart."

"Why?"

'Because then we would never be here. But what of him?'

"Longworth is very like him. It is only a chance resemblance, but it is really very striking. And for her dead son's sake Mrs. Windsor is fond of Longworth. My dear, your grandmother may seem a little hard and cold to you, a little too tender to this man, but when you think of the reason you must pity her."

"I do not know that I do. When her son was taken her daughter was left. Does it not strike you that she, not this stranger with the chance resemblance, should have been the comforter?"

"Little Queen, if we only look at the right and wrong of things——"

"How else should we look at them? Listen here, madame." The girl sits erect, passionate anger in her voice, passionate fire in her eyes. "You see us here, my sister and myself. Do you think Madame Windsor ever asked us to come? You know better. You know what she was to my mother—cold, loveless, unmotherly, unforgiving to the last. Was she likely, then, to relent to my father's daughters? I say you know better. We came unasked; we forced ourselves upon her. Do you know what she meant to do? She meant to meet us at New York and send us back—back in shame and ignominy. She made her will, and gave our birth-right to this stranger. Without consulting him, this wise man, this infallible judge, she will not even thrust her granddaughters from her door. And he—oh, he is good, and upright, and great, as you say, my friend—he says, 'No, no, you must not. It would not be right. You must let these poor girls come; you must give them a home; and I will not take your money—it is theirs, not mine.' Oh, he is indeed generous and noble—with that which is none of his. So we come; we owe it to your friend that we are here, that we have a roof to cover us, food to eat, clothes to wear. And I

burn with shame, and rage, and humiliation, whenever I see him, and feel his kingly, compassionate look upon me, the pauper he has saved from beggary and—— It is wicked, I know, and unjust, if you like, but I will hate him for it my whole life long !”

“Good Heaven above !” says Miss Hariott. She stands basket in one hand, shears in the other, a petrified listener.

The girl has not risen, but she sits upright as a dart, her small hands clenched, her eyes aflame with passionate anger and scorn. All this has been burning within her since the night of her arrival, and must come out. Perhaps Marie is right, and Aunt Denise has not judiciously trained this girl. A violent and undisciplined temper appears, certainly, to be one of her prominent gifts.

Longworth stands listening to every word. If they turn their heads ever so slightly they must infallibly see him ; but both are too absorbed. For him, the picture he sees, he never forgets. The small, slight figure sitting in the garden chair, in its gray dress, a knot of crimson ribbon at the throat, another in the hair—for even these details he takes in—and the impassioned, ringing voice that speaks. The words he hears remain with him forever—his portrait as Mlle. Reine sees him.

There is a pause after her last words, Miss Hariott, her face very grave, breaks it.

“Mademoiselle, you are cruelly unjust——”

“Ah, he is your friend !” breaks in mademoiselle, with scorn.

“If he were not, if he were the most utter stranger, I would still maintain it—you are cruelly unjust to Mr. Longworth. Yes, he is my friend—my friend, tried and true, of many years—and I know him to be incapable of one sordid thought or action—a thoroughly generous and honorable man. He spoke to your grandmother as I would have done

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in his place, only I never could have spoken one-half so well ; and in renouncing your fortune, let me tell you, mademoiselle, he has done what not ten men out of a thousand would have done."

"Do I deny it? Do I not say he acted generously and well? You talk like Marie, as if I doubted it. Mon Dieu ! I say from first to last he is the grandest of men, and I—detest him !"

"That I regret. You will one day see its injustice, however. I am glad your sister is disposed to be more fair. I observed last night that you avoided him ; I thought something had prejudiced you against him, but I did not dream it was as bad as this. I am more than sorry ; I had hoped you would be friends."

"My good or bad opinion can matter nothing to a gentleman who has such hosts of warm advocates," says Mademoiselle Reine, stooping to pick up her hat. "I ought not to come and say such things to you, and show you my horrid temper, but I know nobody, and I am only a girl and cannot help it. We are all alone in the world ; she is our only parent or relative, and it seems hard—oh, how hard !—to be indebted to a stranger for the cold charity she gives, scorning us all the while. You see what a senseless creature I am, madame, for you are my only friend, and I risk the loss of your friendship by speaking in this way of the man you like. But do not withdraw that friendship, or I shall be poor indeed, and in spite of all this I want you to like me a little."

She is smiling, but there are tears in her eyes. Miss Hariott takes the hand she extends in both her own, and stoops and kisses the low, broad forehead.

"Little Queen," she says, "did I not tell you before, I fell in love with you at sight on board the *Hesperia*? I am more in love with you to-day than ever, unreasonable, prejudiced little mortal that you are. I like honesty, and you are honest. I like people to think for themselves, and that you

do with a vengeance. But still, I repeat and maintain, you are cruelly unjust to Laurence Longworth."

"I think Monsieur Longworth is here," says Reine, suddenly.

She has chanced to glance around and seen him standing there, not three yards off, examining the long, yellow buds of a tea-rose. She turns quite white for a moment, and her face takes a startled look; the next a flash of proud defiance leaps into it. She faces him resolutely, lips compressed, eyes alight.

"You have heard every word," that fiery glance says; "you know how I scorn and despise you, and I am glad of it."

"Good afternoon, ladies," says Mr. Longworth, placidly, taking off his hat. "I trust I see you both well after the fatigue of last night?"

Neither speaks. Miss Hariott measures with her eye the distance at which he has stood, and thoroughly as she is accustomed to his cool audacity—or, as Frank puts it, "the stupendous magnificence of his cheekiness"—on this occasion it for the first instant renders her dumb. The pause grows so embarrassing that Reine rises to go.

"Mademoiselle," the gentleman says, "if my coming hastens your departure, Miss Hariott will have reason to regret my very ill-timed visit."

"Your coming does not influence my departure in the least," responds Mademoiselle, coldly and proudly. "Mees Hariott"—she turns to that lady, a laugh in her eyes—"you cannot imagine how much good my visit has done me. I go away with conscience lightened, and a mind relieved, and I will return to-morrow, and all the to-morrows, if you will let me. Until then, give me one of your roses as a souvenir."

"I wonder you care to have it. Mrs. Windsor's specimens are the finest in the country round."

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"They are not half as sweet as these. Adieu, then, madame, until we meet again."

She passes Mr. Longworth in silence, with a stately little bow. Mr. Longworth, also in silence, gravely and profoundly responds. Miss Hariott goes with her guest to the gate, and when she returns, finds Longworth comfortably in the chair the young lady has just vacated, and (need it be said?) lighting the inevitable cigar. With sternest majesty in her eye, the lady faces him.

"Laurence Longworth, how long had you been standing eavesdropper there?"

"Let me see," says Mr. Longworth, and pulls out his watch. "I can tell you to a minute. I opened your gate at twenty minutes of four, now it is five minutes past. I must have been standing there examining that yellow rose (the rose-worms are at it, by the way) fully fifteen minutes. But was it eavesdropping, Miss Hariott? And is it your habit and Mlle. Reine's to discuss family secrets in the open air, and in a tone of voice that he who runs may read? I ask for information?"

"You heard every word she said?"

"Every word, I think and hope."

"Very well," says the lady, with some grimness. "At least you verified the adage that listeners never hear any good of themselves, and you have found out how cordially Mademoiselle Reine detests you."

"Very true, but do you know that is not always a bad sign? Mrs. Malaprop says, in fact, that it is best to begin with a little aversion."

"Begin what?"

Longworth laughs, and puffs a volume of smoke into the rose-bushes.

"That elder sister is an exceedingly pretty girl, Laurence."

"Exceedingly pretty, Miss Hester."

"You paid her very marked attention last night, I observed."

"Did you? Perhaps you also observed that very marked attention was paid her by every other man in the house."

"And she will be very rich."

"As one of Mrs. Windsor's heiresses—naturally."

"Larry," goes on Miss Hariott, filling her basket with dead leaves, "I observed, likewise, that Mrs. Windsor watched you two with very friendly eyes. Do you think you can do better than become her grandson-in-law?"

"I don't think I can."

"And it is time you married."

"So several persons have informed me recently. Is my hair turning gray, are the crow's-feet growing so painfully plain, or do I show symptoms of dropping into my dotage, that the necessity of an immediate wife is thus thrust upon me?"

"I do not believe," pursues the lady of the cottage, "in any man or woman marrying for money; but if marriage and money go hand in hand, held together by a moderate amount of affection, why, then the combination is eminently judicious, and greatly to be desired."

"And that moderate amount of affection you think I could get up for Mrs. Windsor's elder granddaughter? Well, she is beautiful enough, and brilliant enough to warrant a moderate amount, certainly. I presume it would be quite useless to turn my thoughts toward *la petite Reine*? Her insuperable aversion is not to be overcome."

"She rings true and clear as steel. She does not like you—in her place perhaps I would not either—"

"But what have I done? I try to be civil. I asked her to dance twice last night, and she refused. She runs away now when I come. She goes out of the room when I visit the Stone House. I consider myself badly treated—I am scorned, and I don't know why."

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"I think you do, or you are duller than I ever gave you credit for. It is unjust, but it is natural, and I don't like her any the less for it. But this is beside the question. I suppose if you fell in love with either, it would of course be Marie!"

"Why of course?"

"She is beautiful—Reine is not. Need we give any other reason to a man?"

"It is your turn to be unjust, Miss Hariott. Men do not always give the palm to beauty. The women of history, ancient and modern, who have exercised the most extraordinary power of fascination have been plain—they leave more to the imagination, I presume. But Mademoiselle Reine is not plain—no woman could be with such a pair of eyes, such an angelic voice, and such a smile. The light of that smile does not often fall upon me; I regret to say—I might appreciate its beauty less if it did."

"Very true. But do you mean to tell me——"

"I don't mean to tell you anything, except that Mlle. Marie, with all her loveliness, is a blonde, and blondes are tasteless and insipid."

"Indeed! You did not always think so."

"A man may change his mind. It is a woman's prerogative, but a man may use it. I think so now. Are you not nearly through with that eternal snip-snip? If you are, here is a bundle of new novels. Look over them and let me have your opinion for the next number of the *Weekly Phoenix*."

"You will stay and have tea?" says Miss Hariott, receiving the books.

But Mr. Longworth declines—he is on his way home to dinner, and accordingly departs. He takes the Stone House on his way and makes one of his friendly informal calls on its mistress, to inquire for her health and that of Miss Landedelle. Marie is alone in the drawing-room when he enters,

perfectly dressed, all the red-gold hair floating loosely, and she looks up and welcomes him with a cordiality that amply makes amends for her obdurate sister's perversity.

"I came to ask you how you were, but I need not," he says, holding the slim, white hand she gives him, and looking into the bright face. "I wonder if anything could make you look pallid and fatigued?"

"Not five hours' dancing, certainly. Besides, I slept all day; I have a talent for sleeping. We all have some one talent, have we not? The party was pleasant, and I like your Baymouth people so much. How very handsome your cousin is, Mr. Longworth."

"Totty—Mrs. Sheldon? Yes she is rather. I had another cousin present last night for whom you do not inquire, and who stands in need of inquiry, I assure you."

"Mr. Frank Dexter? He is well, I hope?"

"Not at all well—uncommonly ill I should say; in mind of course, not in body. Need I speak more plainly of what is patent to all the world? In your strength remember mercy, Miss Landelle!"

Mrs. Windsor comes in, is pleased to see Mr. Longworth, and presses him to stay. This second invitation he also declines, thinking as he does so that Frank is half right, and that he must be developing sundry tame-cattish proclivities to be so greatly in request.

Reine does not appear, but as he goes down the avenue, he catches a glimpse of a gray dress, and a red breast-knot ahead. She makes no attempt to avoid him, returns his formal salute, and passes on. And then at his feet, where she has stood a moment before, he sees that other knot of crimson silk which she has worn in her hair. He stoops and picks it up, glances after her with the honest intention, no doubt, of following and restoring the dropped property; thinks better of it, puts it into his breast-pocket, and goes on.

"Another time," he thinks; "my intentions are virtuous, but my courage is weak. It would take more moral nerve than I possess to face that stately little refrigerator again, just now."

He goes home, and dines, lingers with the boarders for a time, and is "chaffed" about his very pronounced devotion of last night to Mrs. Windsor's heiress. Frank sits opposite, glowering darkly and sullenly, and says nothing. Then Mr. Longworth saunters back to the office and remains there hard at work until nearly eleven. The majority of the boarders have retired before he returns, but the stoop is not quite deserted when he and O'Sullivan ascend the steps, for Mrs. Sheldon sits there alone, wearing the blue silk Longworth admired yesterday, and wrapped in a light summer shawl, apparently watching the stars shining on the bay.

"You, Totty?" says Mr. Longworth, "and at this time of night? You will get your death of cold. What do you mean by sitting here, and looking at the moon?"

"There is no moon to look at," Mrs. Sheldon answers, smilingly. She nods to Mr. O'Sullivan, who discreetly passes in at once. "I do not think I was looking at anything. I have been sitting here, thinking of—you."

"That's friendly," says Longworth in his calmest tone. "Nothing very unkind, I hope. Which of my failings were you grieving over as I came up?"

"Have you failings?" she says. "I suppose you have, but I never see them. I would be ungenerous indeed if I did."

They are getting on dangerous ground. They do drift upon sundry shoals and quicksands occasionally in conversation, but it must be stated the fault is not the gentleman's. He comes to his own rescue promptly now—anything more prosaic than his remark, more unsentimental than his tone, cannot well be conceived.

"I don't know how it may be with you after last night,"

he says, suppressing a yawn, "but I am consumedly sleepy. I got up and went to the office at eight, you know, and have been hard at it ever since. Better come in, Mrs. Sheldon; you'll catch cold to a dead certainty in this dew."

"Laurence!" she exclaims petulantly, "I hate that name from you. Call me Totty always—no one does but you now, and I like it. Mamma says Laura."

"Well, if you like. It's not a very dignified appellation——"

"But I prefer it from you," she says, half under her breath; "it brings back the old times when we were both young. Oh, if they could only come all over again!"

"It would be a tremendous mistake, take my word for it. Old times should never be brought back. Let the dead die, and be buried decently and forever out of sight and mind."

"Is there nothing, then, in the past you would wish brought back, Laurence?"

"Nothing," returns Longworth, promptly, "except, perhaps, a few absconding subscribers. But they are hopeless."

"I was thinking when you came up," she goes on, her voice hurried and tremulous, "of that time so long ago, when your uncle and my mother behaved so badly to us both—to you most of all. When I see you working so hard, and think of what you were, and of all you have lost for my sake, do you think,—Laurence, do you think I can ever forget my folly or forgive my blindness?"

"I don't see why not. You did me no harm—pecuniarily, at least. I never was a happier man in my life than since I have had to work for my living. Don't let the past trouble you on my account, my dear Laura, I beg."

His tone is cool—is sarcastic, almost, one might say. But though her heart is beating suffocatingly, she is not to be stopped in what she wishes to say.

"In those past days," she goes on, brokenly, "I never used to think at all; now I seem to do nothing else. Oh,

what a child I was! how little I valued all that you offered me! how lightly I threw it from me! and now when I would give my life to win it back—— Laurence!" she cries out, in a stifled voice, "is it too late?"

"It is precisely eight years and four months too late," he answers with perfect composure. He is in for it, and may as well have it out. "I offered you a boy's senseless passion, and you very properly refused it. You threw me over and married Sheldon, a much better fellow. For that sort of thing there is no resurrection. As to the rest—my uncle's fortune, and so on—I don't regret its loss. As Mr. Longworth's heir presumptive I was simply good for nothing; as a hard-working editor I flatter myself I am good for something. That mad thirst for gold which some men possess I never felt, and never will, and like the rest of mankind I compound 'for the sins I am inclined to, by damning those I have no mind to.' I happen to be one of the people to whom money is not the chief end and aim of life, to whom their art would be dear though it kept them beggars. It is exceedingly kind of you, of course, to think of me in this way, and regret the past for my sake; but you need not—for I never do. You see in me a perfectly satisfied man, content with to-day, not asking too much of to-morrow, and never, never for an instant wishing to recall yesterday. We will always be good friends and cousins, I hope, Totty; more than friends—never again."

The calm, friendly voice ceases. She has buried her face in her hands and turned from him, shamed, humbled, rejected.

"Best come in," he says, gently; "you're certain to be laid up with cold in the head to-morrow."

She lifts her face, but keeps it turned from him, her pale blue eyes, with an angry gleam in them, fixed on the misty sea.

"A cold in the head!" she repeats, and laughs derisively.

"You have been a poet and a novelist, Mr. Longworth, but you are not a romantic man. Don't let me detain you—don't mind me—I will go in directly."

He takes her at her word, turning to go, sorry that he has wounded her, but not liking the situation, and not knowing what to say. So he says, "Good-night," and goes in, and leaves her there alone. And, though he is not a romantic man, two little verses he has read somewhere come to his memory as he goes upstairs :

"I had died, for this last year, to know
You loved me. Who shall turn on fate?
I care not if love come or go
Now; though your love seek mine for mate,
It is too late.

"You loved me, and you loved me not,
A little much and overmuch—
Will you forget as I forget?
Let all dead things lie dead; none such
Are soft to touch."

CHAPTER XI.

LONGWORTH'S IDYL.

HIS face has shown very little feeling of any sort, as he stood leaning against the honeysuckle-wreathed pillar of the stoop and rejected a woman, but this impassiveness has grown with him second nature. But at least the brief interview has banished all present desire for sleep. He seats himself before the open window, elevates his boots on the sill, tilts back his chair in genuine Yankee fashion, kindles the inevitable cigar, without which he can neither write nor think, and prepares to introvert himself. Here in his quiet

room, with all the house at rest around him, the low, murmurous sound of the water lapping the shore, the slipping of a branch, the tremulous twitter of a bird in its nest, the innumerable sounds of silence alone to be heard, ten years of his life slip away, and he is back in the gallant and golden days of his youth, hopeful, high-hearted, enthusiastic, twenty-two, and in love.

The broad expanse of star-lit bay fades from before him; a Southern landscape, steeped in the fire of an April sun, takes its place. He sees the long white Georgian mansion, with its piazzas, its open doors and windows, the cotton-fields afar off with the negroes at work, the "quarters," a miniature village, where his Uncle Longworth's people live. It is a fair picture, a noble domain, one day to be all his own. As a boy, orphaned and nearly destitute, his rich and childless uncle, who all his life had held himself aloof from his family and every domestic tie, absorbed heart and soul in the hot pursuit of gold, came forward and took him to his home—to his heart as well, such heart as his life-long worship of Mammon had left him. He was a handsome lad, and a gallant, brave, high-spirited, self-willed, full of generous impulses, rash to recklessness; but with a heart as tender and nearly as easily touched as a girl's. And, best of all, with the God-fearing principles of a gentle and loving mother so deeply implanted that neither the world, the flesh, nor the devil (and all three battled hard in his life of ease and self-indulgence under his uncle's roof) could ever wholly eradicate them. He was truthful to an extreme, open and frank as the day, with a temper as sunny and nearly as hot as the cloudless southern weather. In short a youth, so unlike in all things, the grave, self-repressed man of thirty, that in looking backward he might well wonder what had become of that old impetuous self.

Laurence Longworth was a nephew and an heir to be proud of, and old James Longworth was proud of him. All the

love of a money-grubbing life that might have been divided between wife and children, was concentrated on his boy. He sent him to a Northern college until he was eighteen, and then to Germany for the next four years, to complete a most thoroughly unbusiness-like and uncommercial education. The boy should never grub along in dingy warehouses, nor lose that bright and golden beauty of his, pouring over dry-as-dust ledgers. He should not even be a professional man; with the wealth he was to inherit, what need of toiling to master a profession? He should be a young Georgian prince; he should marry, by and by, of the elect of the land; he should rear sons to hand the name of Longworth, undefiled by commerce, down to dim futurity. That was the old man's ambition, and young Laurence was only too ready and willing to gratify it.

He led a lordly life; his pockets were filled with money scattered hither and thither with a reckless prodigality. Mr. Longworth never stinted him—when he traveled it was *en prince*. Indeed he was known as "Duke Laurence" during his life at Heidelberg. With it all he had his own ambition, and high sense of honor, and notions of the obligations of a prince, and studied hard, and ended his course with university honors. Among the varied and useful information not set down in the university course, was a taste for smoking, for the unlimited consumption of lager-bier, and the other German nectars, for small-sword exercise, and soft-eyed, fair-haired Gretchens. About one of these frauleins he fought a duel the last year, pinked his adversary, without doing him much damage, and finally returned home and fell in love with his second cousin, Laura. It was his very first serious "affaire;" that of Gretchen had been the veriest summer-day fancy—born and buried in an hour. But this was different, you understand. She was not unlike Gretchen either, at sixteen; tall for her age, inclined even then to a delightful plumpness, all that flaxen hair falling fluffy and crimping to her

waist, and in "lunatic fringe" to her very eyebrows. The blue eyes were rather small, rather light, rather expressionless, and the ready smile that came and went so incessantly, rather vacuous, and insipid, and silly. That is, it might seem so, to hypercritical people—to Laurence Longworth, *à la* twenty-two, Laura Longworth was a paradisiacal vision of purity, loveliness, and white Swiss dresses, and to win this most beauteous of her sex for his wife would be to crown his existence with never-ending ecstasy.

Miss Laura Longworth, otherwise Totty, at sixteen had no more mind of her own, no more individual soul, than a newly-hatched chicken. But she could see that young Laurence was handsome, and dressed in perfect taste, and wore such diamond studs and buttons as made her small, pale eyes open wide in wonder and admiration. His taste was not toned in those days—the lad was inclined to be foppish, and liked diamonds of the first water, and superfine linen, and broadcloth. His presents, too, were such as any heir-presumptive might offer to his princess consort, and Totty's white fat little hands were hands to hold fast all they could grasp, even at sixteen. The costly books and bouquets she did not care about, but the jewelry touched her inmost soul. It was tiresome of Larry to insist on lying at her feet on the grass, and reading dull poetry aloud by the hour out of those aforesaid blue and gilt books. Poetry bored Totty—so did books of any kind, in fact, but this was the only drawback she could find in her splendid young lover. And so the sweet, hot weeks wore on, and June was approaching, and Mrs. Longworth began to talk of fleeing from the summer heats, and going back to her Baymouth home.

A word of Mrs. Longworth. She was so remotely akin to the old millionaire merchant that she never dared to count upon the kinship. And she was a lady ready to dare a good deal. Her late husband, besides being only a *very* distant cousin of James Longworth, had made James Longworth io

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early youth his bitter foe. Mr. Longworth was a good hater ; he never pardoned an affront, never forgave an enemy if he could help himself. And so, when at the beginning Laurence had come one day full of the news and exclaimed, " I say, uncle, here's Mrs. Longworth from Raymouth and her daughter stopping at the Sheldons'. It would only be handsome, sir, I think, to ask them here," the old man had bent his bushy gray brows and scowled.

" Tom Longworth's widow and her girl here ! What are they after ? Very bad taste on their part to come where I am ; but I know that woman—a brazen, bold-faced hussy, and vicious enough for anything. Tom Longworth was a knave and a fool ; no widow or daughter of his shall ever cross this threshold."

" But you have no right, sir, to visit the wrong-doing of the father upon—— "

" Bosh, Larry ! How old is this girl ? "

" Sixteen, sir, and one of the loveliest—— "

" Of course ! of course ! Every bread-and-butter school-girl is an angel in the eyes of a soft-headed boy of twenty-two. What has her mother brought her down here for ? Couldn't she barter her off up North ? Or does she want to catch young Sheldon ? He's next door to a fool, but his prospects are good, and I daresay Sarah Longworth will find it easier to inveigle a fool than a man endowed with the average amount of common sense. For you, Larry, my lad, I never interfere with your amusements, as you know—flirt with this little Longworth, or any one else, to your heart's content. There is a certain amount of calf love which young fellows of your stamp find it indispensable to get rid of somehow before they marry and settle ; you may bestow a little of its superfluity on this girl, if you like ; but when it comes to marrying, you shall please me as well as yourself. That will do ! Reserve your eloquence for the future, when you go to represent your native State in Congress, you know—don't

inflict it on me. You told me you were short of funds yesterday. Here's a check for current expenses. Go and enjoy yourself; but mind, my boy"—he lays his hand on the lad's square shoulder, and looks at him, half-imperiously, half-fondly—"nothing serious for two or three years yet."

Young Laurence, very erect, very resolute, very indignant, opens his lips to answer, is waved authoritatively down, takes his check, rides off to town, and buys a pearl necklace for his fair, pale goddess. It is the only sort of offering he has discovered that can bring a sparkle of rapture to her eyes, a flush of joy to her cheeks. Flowers may have a language to him—to Miss Totty, peerless but practical, they speak not half so eloquently as pearls. It disappoints him a little, but girls are like that, he judges, fond of jewels, and laces, and pretty things. He is fond of them himself, in a way.

It is hardly necessary, perhaps, to record, that long before this he "has told his love," in burning and eloquent words—not that burning eloquence was needed—and has been accepted.

Mrs. Longworth is enchanted. Some ultimate design upon young William Sheldon has brought her here, it may be, but young Laurence Longworth is more than she could have hoped for. As the wife of James Longworth's heir, Totty's position and her own are secure for all time. But Mrs. Longworth must go home, and this pleasant idyl must come to an end. Laurence must speak to his uncle, says Mrs. Longworth; it would place her darling in a false position, to take her away, engaged, without Mr. Longworth's sanction and blessing, and that she could never consent to.

Laurence goes home and speaks. He stands before his uncle in the rosy evening light, flushed, eager, handsome, pleading. He loves his Cousin Laura to distraction, he can have neither life nor hope apart from her, she will be the inspiration, the good genius of his life; will her uncle not

forget and forgive the past, and take her to his heart as the daughter of his home?

James Longworth listens, growing purple with passion, and rises from his chair with a great oath. Accept her! the artful, maneuvering daughter of a brazen, sordid, match-making, money-hunting mother? Allow Tom Longworth's daughter to enter this house as its mistress? He would set fire to it with his own hand and burn it to the ground first. For Laurence, he is a fool, a love-sick, sentimental, ridiculous young fool, and if ever he mentions that girl's name in his hearing again, he will turn him out of the house without a shilling, like the beggar he was when he took him in.

James Longworth in a passion is a sight not good to see; he is not choice in his words nor particular in his epithets. He sinks back now, out of breath, mopping his crimson old face, and glaring up ferociously angry at his heir. That contumacious young gentleman stands before him, his blond face quite colorless with a passion as intense as his own, his lips set, a steely fire in his handsome blue eyes, but though his rage is at white heat, he holds himself well in hand. Whenever the uncle waxes furious, and coarse, and vituperative, the nephew puts him down with contemptuous, lordly, gentlemanly, frigid quiet.

"Whatever abusive epithets you may find it necessary to use, sir," in his most ducal way says "Duke Laurence," looking the fiery old man unwinkingly in the eye, "you will have the goodness to apply to me, not to a young lady whose acceptance of my suit I consider the chief honor of my life. I will not give her up. As to turning me out without a shilling, the beggar that you found me, that is a threat you have made before. To save you the trouble of repeating it, the next time you make it I will take you at your word."

Mr. Laurence leaves the room, and smarting with anger and wounded dignity, rides at a furious rate to his lady's bower, to proclaim that through good and ill, through fire

and water, through life and beyond life, he is hers, to do with as she chooses.

Totty listens, and wishes he wouldn't—he makes her head ache when he goes on like that, he had better speak to mamma, mamma will know what to do. And mamma knits her maternal brows, and looks anxious.

"Laurence, does he mean that?" she asked; "is it only an idle threat of anger, or will he keep his word? I mean about disinheriting you."

"I think it is extremely likely," says Laurence, coolly; "the sort of customer, is the governor, to say unpleasant things, and stick to them. But you know Mrs. Longworth, not a thousand fortunes shall come between me and my love for Totty."

"Oh! I know, I know," says Mrs. Longworth, in a still more worried tone; "of course you're everything that's honorable, Larry, but it isn't that. You see there is honor due on our side too, and I couldn't, oh! I really couldn't allow you to ruin yourself for my daughter's sake. If your uncle won't consent, you must give her up."

"And a pretty, penniless, good-for-nothing son-in-law I should have on my hands," adds the lady, mentally, glancing contemptuously to the fair-haired prince of the house of Longworth. "A nice lily of the field you would be, if cut off with a shilling, neither able to toil nor spin, twenty-two years of age, and fit for nothing but to read tomfoolery out of poetry books, and talk like the hero of a novel."

"Give her up!" cries young Laurence, with eyes afire. "Never! My uncle shall come round and accept her, or if he does not I can still make my own way in life. I have youth, and health, and strength, a fair education, and the average of brains. Surely I am not such a milksop as to be unable to achieve a career for myself. The world is mine oyster—I'll open it. I ask nothing but that Totty may be true to me."

Mrs. Longworth listens to this rhapsody with ill-concealed contempt.

"Well, my dear boy," she says, "if you can bring your uncle round, well and good—I will be delighted to give you Totty. But if you cannot—and indeed I am afraid you cannot, for he is the most obstinate old wretch on earth—if you cannot, I say——"

"You will refuse me Totty—do you mean that?" cries the lad, indignantly.

"Well, now, Laurence, be reasonable. Think of it. You are twenty-two, you have no profession, you are unfit for trade, you can't live on a very fine university education and a knowledge of Greek and Latin, French and German. I believe a young man who has to make his way in the world will get on much better without any of those things, although the French and German might not hurt him. There would be an engagement of years and years, and I object to long engagements, and I am poor, very poor, Larry, and Totty would have a hard time. Still we won't do anything prematurely; we will wait and see what you can do with the flinty-hearted old uncle."

Laurence seeks out Totty—poor Totty!—and pours his love and his wrath into her ears until she cries. Why does he come to her? she says, piteously. She doesn't know—mamma knows; whatever mamma says, she must do of course. Oh, yes, she likes him—well, loves him then, and will wait for him, if mamma will let her, ever and ever so long, or will marry him to-morrow if mamma is willing just the same. But please don't go on so any more; it always makes her head ache, and she is willing to do anything, and please everybody, if only mamma will give her leave.

Laurence goes home dissipated, sore, very love-sick, and cast down indeed. Old Mr. Longworth looks at him and laughs to himself, and while he laughs he pities his boy. He has quite got over his anger; his red-hot rages with Larry

never last, and he makes up his mind to buy off this woman and her girl, and pack them back where they came from, and cure Laurence of his boyish folly. He is a man to strike while the iron is hot, in business and out of it. He rides into town, seeks out Mrs. Longworth the very next day, has a plain, curt, prosaic, business-like interview with her, perfectly civil, quiet, passionless.

"I like the lad," the old man says, his hands clasped over his cane, his chin upon them, his stern old eyes on the lady's discomfited face; "it is for his sake I want this foolery ended and done with. He is my heir, as you know; he has been brought up like a king's son; left to himself, he is utterly unable to make his way an inch in the world. I have done it on purpose; I want him to be solely dependent upon me. If he marries your daughter I'll turn him out; a dollar of my money he shall never see. You know me, ma'am. I'm not the sort to bluster and swear, and come round in the end with my fortune and blessing. I'll turn him adrift, I say—I'll take my sister's son, little Dexter, in his place. Your daughter will have a fine, high-toned, thoroughly educated young gentleman for a husband, and you will have a beggar for a son-in-law. I don't think that would suit your book, ma'am. But the boy is bothered over this affair—I can see it—and will be until all is over. Then he'll come round all right and fast enough. Young men die, and worms eat them, but not for love. Now, Mrs. Longworth, how much will you take, ma'am, and go off with your young lady, and let my boy see her no more? I've spent money freely on him, for his pleasure and profit, up to the present; I'm ready to spend a trifle more now. Name your price, and try and be reasonable."

"Mr. Longworth, this is outrageous," cries the lady in a fury. "Do you think my daughter's affections are to be bought and sold like so many bales of cotton?"

"Is that a hint at my business, ma'am? I'm not in cot

ton bales any more. As to the affections—never mind *them*. She's not her dear mother's daughter if she doesn't prefer bread and butter to a kiss and a drink of water. There's young Sheldon—I hear he's willing—couldn't you pass her along to him? For you—you are poor, I understand, and have a clear head for figures. Give the sum a name, ma'am, and then I'll make my stipulations."

Mrs. Longworth looks him full in the face, and names the sum—no trifle. Old James Longworth, still with his chin on his cane, chuckles inaudible admiration.

"My word, ma'am, you're a cool hand, and a clever one! It's a round price, but for the lad's sake—. If I pay it I must make my conditions, and the first is, that Laurence is to know nothing, absolutely nothing, of this little business transaction, or of my visit to you at all."

"Have no fear, sir; I am not so proud of either that I am likely to proclaim them," says Mrs. Longworth, bitterly.

"Very good, ma'am—it's not a creditable affair—to you. The second is, that you are to make your daughter refuse him—say she mistook herself and her affections, and what not—she'll know. If she doesn't you can coach her. You're a clever woman."

"Thank you, sir," says Mrs. Longworth, still more bitterly.

"The third is, that you'll marry her to Willy Sheldon, if Willy Sheldon wants her, and as quickly as may be. He does want her, doesn't he?"

"He has asked my daughter to marry him, if that is what you mean."

"That is what I mean. And she—"

"Being engaged to your nephew, sir, she refused him."

"Well, the obstacle of that engagement being removed, there is no reason why these young hearts shouldn't come together," says old Mr. Longworth, with a sneer. "Nothing else will thoroughly cure Larry of his besotted folly. Sheldon's prospects are good; he is senior clerk in a big

banking-house, and will be junior partner before long, if I choose to give him a push. I'll give him that push when he's your daughter's husband. For you, ma'am, I'll give you one-half the sum you have named, when you have turned out Laurence, and are ready to go. The second half I will hand over the day you are mother-in-law to little Willie Sheldon. I'll give you my bond for it in black and white."

Two days after, standing by her mother's side, a little pale and scared, Laura Longworth gave Laurence Longworth his dismissal and his diamond ring.

It was the only thing she did give him of all his gifts. All that "portable property" in gold and precious stones lay snugly upstairs. It cost her a greater pang to part with the fine solitaire she drew off her finger than it did to part with the gallant and handsome young lover, who stood before her pallid with pain, but taking his punishment like a man. She had mistaken herself—she cared most for Willy, and she never could consent to ruin her cousin Laurence. They must part, and—and here was his ring, and—and Willy wished the wedding to take place speedily, and he was to follow them to Baymouth in a month, and—and they were to be married the last of July. Perhaps Laura hoped that Laurence in a transport of passion would fling that diamond at her feet—her eyes were upon it all the while, and never had it sparkled so temptingly; but he did nothing of the sort; he picked it up and put it in his pocket without a word. There was no appeal—he did not try to appeal. She had said she cared for William Sheldon most—that settled everything. He stood white and silent, his brows knit, his blue eyes stern, amazed, contemptuous, and then he took his hat, and bowed to both ladies, and went out of the house, feeling that for him, and for all time, the whole world had come to an end.

He did not go away. He spoke of the matter just once to his uncle, in words brief and few.

"It's all over, sir," he said. "She is to marry Will Shel don. I'll try to please you next time, instead of myself. Excuse anything I may have said, and don't let us speak of it again."

But he grew thin as a shadow, moodily indifferent to all things, silent, pale. Nothing could arouse or amuse him; all his old pursuits lost their savor, books, horses, billiards held no charms, his apathy grew on him day by day. As the fatal wedding-day drew near, his gloom and depression became so profound that his uncle grew alarmed. The boy must go away—must travel. This foolery and love-sickness was becoming startling—the last state of the youthful swain was worse than the first. Laurence must try change.

"All right, sir, I'll go," Laurence answers, wearily; "one place is as good as another. I'll try New York."

He goes to New York, and New York does him good, after a fashion. Not mentally nor morally, perhaps, for he gets into a rather reckless set, and gambles and drinks much more than is good for him, but it certainly helps him to get over his love fever. He reads Miss Laura Longworth's marriage in the papers one July morning, stares at it in a stony way for awhile, then throws down the sheet, and laughs in the diabolical way the first murderer does his cachinnation on the stage, and out-Herod's Herod in mad dissipation for the ensuing week. At the end of that period he receives a visit from Mrs. Longworth, which sobers him more effectually than many bottles of soda-water.

"I heard you were here, Laurence," she says, to the young man, who receives her with Arctic coldness. "I have come from Baymouth on purpose to see you. Now that Totty is married" (Laurence grinds his teeth), "and the money paid to the last cent, I may speak. I do not do it for revenge." Oh, the vengeful fire that blazes in Mrs. Longworth's eyes as she says it! "Far be it from me to cherish so sinful a feeling. But I think you ought to know Totty

loved you best, Laury—I may tell it surely now, since she will never know—and nothing would have made her give you up but the fear of ruining you for life. I am a poor woman, Laurence, a poor hard-working widow, and need I shame to say it, I have my price. Your uncle bought me off, and but for him my daughter might be your wife to-day instead of Sheldon's."

"For Heaven's sake stop!" the young fellow says, hoarsely. "I can't stand this! Don't talk of her if you want me to keep my senses. What is this of my uncle?"

She sits, vindictive triumph in her face, and tells him the story, exaggerating his uncle's part, extenuating her own, repeating every sneer, every threat.

"I say again," she concludes, "but for this money which poverty alone forced me to accept, and the dread of ruining you, Totty would be your bride, not Willy Sheldon's, at this hour."

Her work is done and she goes away—done almost too well she is afraid, as she looks in young Laurence's stony, fixed face at parting. But he says little or nothing—in these deadly white rages of his he always becomes dumb. But that night, as fast as steam can carry him, he is on his way to his Southern home.

In the yellow blaze of an August afternoon, dusty and travel-worn, he reaches it. Unannounced, unexpected, he opens the door of his uncle's study and stands before him. Mr. Longworth, sitting at his desk writing, looks up in eager and glad surprise at his boy.

"What! Larry, lad! So soon? Well, soon or late, always glad to see you. But, what is the matter, boy? you do not look well."

Truly he did not. His cheeks were hollow, his lips were white, dark circles were beneath his eyes, and in those steadfast eyes a fire that boded no good. Physically, at

least, his fortnight in New York had not benefited the heir of the Longworths.

"You are busy, sir," is his answer, in an odd, constrained voice; "I will wait until you have finished."

"My writing need never be finished; I was answering your last letter, my boy. You asked for more money—you spend like a prince, Larry; but I have brought you up like a prince, and I find no fault. Here is the check, you see, ready signed."

Laurence takes it, looks at the amount—a large one—then looks steadfastly at the old man.

"Three days ago, sir, Mrs. Longworth came to see me in New York. Her daughter was safely married, her price was safely paid, she had nothing to fear. She came and told me the whole story. By stealth and by treachery you bought her, you compelled her to marry her daughter to Sheldon; your money was an all-powerful lever, as you know; even hearts and souls can be bought and paid for with it. But even money cannot do all things—cannot pay for everything. It bought Mrs. Longworth—it cannot buy me. You have done me many and great services—their memory has helped me to bear the many and great insults you have heaped upon me. But even for millionaires there is a line—you have gone beyond it. I return you your check and bid you good-by. Good-morning!"

He tears the slip of paper deliberately in four pieces, lays them on the table, and turns to go. The old man starts from his chair and holds out his arms. "Laurence!" he cries, in agony; but it is doubtful if that despairing cry reaches him, for the door has closed upon him and he is already gone.

Laurence Longworth returned to New York, and began at the beginning. He was twenty two, he had no profession, and the world was all before him where to choose. It was

tremendously up-hill work, but it did him good. He dropped dissipation of every kind, and forgot Totty Longworth. His classical education, his Greek and Latin hexameters, did not help him much in the beginning of this hard, single-fisted fight with fate; it would have been more to the purpose and infinitely more remunerative if his uncle had taught him shoe-making. He floated about for many months among the flotsam and jetsam of the great army of the Impecunious in a large city, and finally drifted ashore on the Land of Literature. He had fraternized in the days of his princedom with a good many newspaper men—he had a taste for that sort of people—and they got him work now. And having got it, Laurence discovered that he had found his vocation—journalism was his forte and destiny for life. He was attached to the corps of a daily paper, and won his way with a rapidity that left the good comrades who had befriended him far behind. He had acquired stenography as an amusement long ago—it stood him in good stead now. From reporting, in course of time he took to leader-writing; it was found he had a dashing, slashing, daring style, with a strong vein of sarcasm and a subtle touch of humor. He could dash off audacious diatribes against political and social vices, and handle brilliantly every topic he undertook. He held exhaustive opinions on every subject under the sun, ventilated those opinions freely, and was prepared to fight for them, to slay and spare not, in their defense. Promotion followed rapidly. At the end of the second year he was city editor, with a fine salary, of one of the first papers of the day. This position he held two years. Then he discovered the Baymouth *Phoenix* was for sale, went to Baymouth and bought it. It was a promising field, and his one great ambition was to make the world better and wiser by an ideal newspaper. He resigned his position, took Miles O'Sullivan as his second, and settled in Baymouth "for good."

Mr. O'Sullivan was one of the journalistic gentlemen who

had first given Longworth a latch-key to literature—a clever little man in his profession, with a twinkling eye, the national nose, and a rich accent brought from the Reeks of Kerry, to flavor his unexceptionable English.

It was during the first year of struggle that Longworth wrote his novel and volume of verses. Both fell dead. The novel was didactic, and dogmatic, and realistic, and unspeakably dreary; the “poems” were Byronic, gloomy, and vapid. Mr. Longworth never tried again—he had discovered that though a man may be a brilliant journalist, a keen and clever reporter, a sarcastic and witty reviewer, some additional gift is needed to make him a successful novelist and poet. It being agreed on all hands, however, that fiction-writing is the very lowest branch of the lofty tree of literature, he had the less reason to regret this failure, and the failure itself did him this good, that it made him the more austere and carping critic, your true critic being notoriously the man “who has failed in literature and art.”

Mrs. Longworth, with the money that had been her daughter's price, had opened a boarding-house in her native town. The editor of the *Phoenix* became one of her boarders. How completely the love-dream of four years before had died out, may be inferred from this. He bore her no ill-will, he bore his uncle none, now. These four years had been a liberal education, more valuable by far than all that had preceded them. He blamed himself for his conduct to his uncle—the old man had acted wrongly, but he had been fond of him and good to him. He did not greatly regret the lost inheritance—he would not have exchanged the past four years, with their struggles, and failures, and triumphs, for twice that inheritance.

Nothing would ever have induced him to give up his career, and go back to the old useless life, but he could not even if he would. Mr. Longworth, in wrath deep and deadly against his nephew, had adopted his sister's son, Frank Dex

ter. Mrs. Dexter, a widow, had lived in Boston, and Lawrence knew the boy, and liked him. He had no wish to oust him; he had found his work in life, and it was a labor of love. No other love came to rival it; at one-and-thirty Longworth was unmarried and likely to remain so. He had neither time nor inclination for falling in love, his pen and his inkstand were his mistress.

Two years before the night on which he sits and smokes and muses, Mrs. Sheldon, in widow's weeds, had returned to the maternal roof. She had no children; she was handsomer than ever, and she was tolerably well dowered. She and the dashing lover of her youth had met prosaically enough over the buckwheats and boiled eggs of breakfast, and he had shaken hands with her, and looked into the light blue eyes, and smiled to himself as he recalled that dead and nearly forgotten summer idyl. What a consummate young ass he had been; what could he have seen in this big wax doll, with the fluffy flaxen hair and china eyes, who only knew how to say "mamma" when punched in the pit of the stomach, like any other doll? The fluffy flaxen hair was combed back off the low, intellectual forehead now, and the widowhood had expanded her mind; she had pronounced ideas of her own on the subject of spring bonnets and the trimming of dresses—she even read the stories in one or two ladies' magazines. Certainly years and matrimony had developed Mrs. Sheldon. As time wore on a new idea was developed also, a very decided *tendresse* for the handsome and talented author and publisher. People talked of him; he was a man of mark, he delivered lectures that were lauded, he was said to be growing rich. And into that calmly pulsing organ, Mrs. William Sheldon's heart, came something that thrilled at the sound of Longworth's voice, at the touch of his hand, at the glance of his eye.

"She looked at him as one who awakes;
The past was a dream, and her life begun."

Did Longworth observe it? He gave no sign. There were times, certainly, in conversations with his fair kinswoman, when, as Mr. O'Sullivan expressed it, "he shied like a two-year-old." This night on the stoop had finished what had been going on for some time. She had not meant to be unwomanly, or go as far as she had gone, but jealousy, in spite of herself, had forced it from her. She was jealous of Marie Landelle, and sitting brooding over the past and the present, her passion had mastered her, and when he came she had laid her heart at his feet, and seen it—rejected.

A clock down-stairs strikes twelve. Longworth jumps up, and flings away the end of his cigar.

"Midnight and morning here! There goes the town clock! I'm one minute and a half fast. 'Tis the witching hour when churchyards yawn——'" Here Mr. Longworth yawns himself, and winds his watch. "I will to bed."

And as he goes, the words of the poem still keep their jingle in his mind :

"A year divides us, love from love ;
Though you love now, though I loved then,
The gulf is deep, but straight enough ;
Who shall recross—who among men
Shall cross again ?"

CHAPTER XII.

DELICATE GROUND.

HEN Longworth descends to breakfast next morning, he finds Mrs. Sheldon before him, and alone, in the dining-room. She is standing in the bay-window, making a tiny bouquet from among the roses and

geraniums, the brilliant sunshine bathing her in her pretty white wrapper, pale azure ribbons, and pale flaxen hair. A very fair picture of matured beauty, surely ; but Longworth's first thought as he looks at her is : " What an enormous debt of gratitude I owe my uncle for that day's work nine years ago, and what an idiotic young donkey I must have been to be sure ! "

She turns quickly. She has learned to know his step from among all the others, and in six years of marriage she had never learned to distinguish her husband's. Something akin to a flush of shame passes over her face.

" Good morning, Totty," he says genially, standing by her side. " That looks suspiciously like a button-hole bouquet. Who is to be the happy recipient ? "

" You, if you care to have it. Larry ! " she says quickly, and with a catch in her breath, " I want you to forget last night. I must have been mad I think ; I—I let my feelings carry me away. I do not know how to explain what I mean—— "

" There is no explanation needed, my dear child," Longworth says kindly, and with a certain grave tenderness in his tone. (What man in his secret heart does not respect the good taste of a woman who persists in being in love with him ?) " I know that you were but a child in those days—I know that in maturer years you regret the past for my sake, because I lost a fortune, and in your womanly self-abnegation, would sacrifice yourself to atone. I understand it all, but believe me, I never regret that loss. Now, if I am to have that bouquet you must pin it for me."

" You are generous," she says, in a low voice, but she bites her lips as she says it with cruel force. " You always were generous. Trust me, I shall not forget it."

Something in her tone makes Longworth look down at her curiously, but at that moment enters unto them Mr. Miles O'Sullivan. He takes in the situation—the close proximity

the bouquet, the flushed cheeks of the lady—and makes an instinctive step backward. The gesture annoys Longworth, he can hardly tell why.

"Are you from the office, O.?" he calls. "What took you there at this hour?"

"Nothing took me there. I have not been next or near the office. Sure that's a beautiful little posy you've got this morning, chief. Upon my word it's the lucky fellow you are; the favorite of the ladies wherever you go."

"I'll make you one if you like, Mr. O'Sullivan," says Totty, quickly, and moving away. "It's Larry's audacity, I think, that does it. He asked me for it first, and then was too lazy to pin it in."

Mr. O'Sullivan gets his bouquet, and his breakfast, and then he and his superior officer start together for the *Phoenix* building.

"It never rains but it pours; upon me life it's as true as preaching," says the O'Sullivan, glancing complacently down at his nosegay. "It's a fine young woman that same Mrs. Sheldon is all out. They do be saying, chief, you used to be a sweetheart of hers."

"Stuff! What do you mean by saying that it never rains but it pours? Did any one else present you with a cluster of botanical specimens this morning?"

"Not one. But whose acquaintance do ye think I made this morning, Master Larry, while you were rolling in the arrums of Morpheus? Whose now? It's my opinion if I was to give ye a dozen guesses ye wouldn't guess it."

"Shan't try. Who was it? Confound your mysteries."

"Well then—Mademoiselle Reine herself, no less."

"Mademoiselle Reine!"

"Yes, faith, and oh, by me word, it's the sweet spoken young creature she is, with a voice like sugar candy, and eyes of her own, that go through ye like——"

"But where?" cries Longworth, too amazed to let his

companion hunt up a simile—"where, for heaven's sake, did you meet her and speak to her, O'Sullivan? You say you spoke to her?"

"Ay, spoke to her, and more—walked home with her to her grandmother's door, and got a smile at parting. Oh! by this and that, an angel couldn't beat it! It's a beautiful creature she is, Larry, with two eyes like sloes, and teeth like rale pearls, and a laugh like the music of the spheres. Sure you all said ~~was~~ the other one was the beauty, and if she goes beyond Ma'amselle Reine it's a Venus of the first water she must be sure enough."

O'Sullivan pauses in his eulogy, for his chieftain has come to a stand-still in the middle of the street, and is regarding him with menace in his eye.

"Will you, or will you not, tell me where you met Made-moiselle Landelle, and how you came to escort her home?" he demands with ominous calm.

"Oh! I have no objection in life. On fine mornings like this, instead of sweltering in hot bed-clothes, like some men I know of, I get up and attend early church over there on the hill beyond. And there, kneeling among the old women's petticoats, I espies the little darling of the world praying away like the angel that she is."

"Well?" says Longworth. He is surprised rather for a moment, then second thought shows him that nothing is more likely than for a French girl to get up at day-dawn, and go to church to say her prayers. "Are you at liberty to address every young lady you may meet in church, whether you know her or not, O'Sullivan?"

"I didn't address her. 'Twas she who addressed me."

"How?"

"I was standing on the church steps, lighting my pipe before starting to come home, when I hears a voice at my elbow. 'Will ye have the goodness to tell me, sir, at what hour the services are on Sunday?' says this little voice

sweetly, but a trifle timidly, do ye mind. And there she was, the darling, with her trim little figure, as light and graceful as a fairy's, and her smiling face, and her beautiful black eyes——"

"Not black, oh—brown. 'Exquisite brown blessed eyes,' as Jean Ingelow says. But proceed my noble friend—thy tale interests me."

"I knew her in a minute," continues the O'Sullivan; "sure if I heard her and her sister described once, I have a hundred times. 'At seven, and nine, and half-past ten, miss,' I says, taking off my hat and taking out my pipe, 'and half-past three in the afternoon.' 'Thank ye, sir,' says she smiling and dimpling, and looking like the goddess Flora or the fair Aurora. 'Have you a good choir? because if *Monsieur le Curé* will permit it, I would like to join.' We were walking along as sociably as life by this time, and may I never if she didn't notice the pipe! 'Never mind me,' says she; 'have your smoke—I don't dislike it in the open air.' May the Lord reward her for her thoughtfulness!"

"Well?" says Longworth.

He is striding along with his hands in his coat pockets, trying to realize in his mind's eye the frigid, the haughty, the uplifted, the scornful Mlle. Reine tripping along in social chat, "smiling and dimpling," by the O'Sullivan's side.

"Well, then, I took her at her word, and there we walked along together as if we had 'grown in beauty side by side, and filled one house with glee' all our lives. 'I think,' says I, 'that *M. le Curé*—sure his name's Father McGrath, but that's no matter—will be delighted. I know him well,' says I. 'I'll spake to him, if ye like, or I'll introduce ye, which will be better. It's proud and happy he'll be to have ye, for I'm told ye're a fine singer, mademoiselle.' With that she laughs. 'Oh, ye know me, do ye?' says she. 'Who was it told ye? Or maybe,' she says, looking at me doubtfully, 'ye were at grandamma's the other night, and——' I

wasn't, miss,' I says; 'me and your grandmamma haven't the pleasure of each other's acquaintance, but I know her well by sight, and a mighty fine old lady she is. My name's O'Sullivan, mademoiselle, at your service,' I says. 'I board at Mrs. Longworth's, over there beyond, and I'm assistant editor of the *Phaynix*—maybe ye've seen it? But sure if ye haven't ye know Mr. Longworth, the editor-in-chief.' She was smiling—eyes, lips, dimples, and all—a minute before, but, by the virtue of my oath, Larry, every dimple vanished as soon as I mentioned your name. 'Oh,' she says, under her breath, 'yes, I know.' And she shifted her ground in the twinkling of a bed-post, and talked of the choir, and the congregation, and the church, and *M. le Curé*, as she calls poor Father McGrath, until we got to her grandmother's gate."

"And then?" says Mr. Longworth.

"And then she brightens up beautifully, and looks up at me, all the dimples and smiles in full play again; and may I never, if she hasn't the handsomest pair of eyes—brown, or black, or whatever it pleases ye to call them—that ever bored a hole through a man's heart. 'I can't ask ye in,' she says, 'as you tell me grandmamma has not the pleasure of your acquaintance, but I am sure we will meet again. Thank you very much for all your information, and I shall be glad to know *Monsieur le Curé*.' And with that she makes me an elegant little courtesy, and trips away as graceful as ye please. If it's true what they're saying, that you can have your pick and choice, Larry, it's you that ought to be the happy man this day. But it's ever and always the way—it's to you and the likes of you—men with hearts of ice and heads of granite—that such prizes fall, while——"

"Oh, stop that rot, O'Sullivan!" cuts in Longworth, with very unusual impatience. "And before we part, I will say this: You are about the cheekiest beggar it has ever been my good fortune to meet. The effrontery of coolly doing escort

duty for a young lady you never saw in your life before, and offering to introduce her to other people before you are introduced to her yourself, is a piece of unblushing impudence only to be perpetrated by an Irishman."

Mr. Longworth goes into his private room, and shuts out his second with a bang. Mr. O'Sullivan pauses a moment to regard the door.

"May I never if he isn't jealous!" he says, calmly, "So show the one, is she, and not the beauty?" and then takes off his coat, substitutes a duster, and sets to work.

During the week that ensues there is a press of work in the *Phoenix* office, and neither chief editor nor sub-editor has time or opportunity to see much of Mlle. Reine Landelle. A murder trial is going on in Baymouth. Even in pretty peaceful, pastoral sea-side towns the tiger in man crops out occasionally. This is a very horrid affair, a very romantic and melodramatic affair. A handsome young factory girl had shot a gentleman of wealth and position on the very eve of his wedding-day. The details were many, and thrilling, and disagreeable, and intensely interesting, and there were extra editions and supplements without number to satisfy the feverish demand.

Mr. Longworth, deeply interested in the case, and spending a great deal of his time in the court-house, becomes invisible to his friends, until one evening he drops in upon Miss Hariott, and finds there the Demoiselles Landelle and Frank Dexter. They are all grouped together in the twilight in the little garden, and Longworth has time to think as he approaches, what he has thought so many times before, how faultlessly lovely Marie Landelle is. Her beauty is so great that it comes upon the beholder, like a vision, she shall see her a dozen times a day, always as a sort of surprise.

"Was Helen of Troy as beautiful? Was the woman for whom Marc Anthony lost a world as peerless as she was brown, and middle-aged and coarse—it is not such fair

and frail flower faces that men have gone mad, and worlds have been lost and won."

She is lying back, languid in the sultry heat, dressed in white, her broad-brimmed sun-hat in her lap, her gold red hair falling loosely over her shoulders as usual. Young Dexter is lying on the grass at her feet; all is speechless adoration in his uplifted eyes. He scowls darkly as Longworth draws near. Close by sits Miss Hariott fanning herself. Inside in the dusky parlor Mlle. Reine is playing for them softly; through the parted curtains he can catch a glimpse of a black gauzy dress, of a stately little dark head, and some long lemon-colored buds in hair and belt.

"Will somebody introduce me to this gentleman?" inquires Miss Hariott. "Nine whole days have elapsed since these eyes beheld him. Who can be expected to keep a friend in remembrance all that time?"

"Who, indeed?" says Longworth, "especially when the 'who' is a lady. Mademoiselle Marie, I salute you. Frank, whence this moody frown? May I seat myself beside you, Miss Hariott? The grass is damp, the dews are falling, else would I stretch myself as my young kinsman is doing, at beauty's feet, defy rheumatics, and sun myself in its smiles. Mrs. Windsor is well, I hope, Miss Landelle?"

"I think grandmamma must always be well," responds Mlle. Marie, with one of her faint, sweet smiles—she rarely gets beyond smiles. "I cannot imagine her weak or ailing. She wonders sometimes, as Miss Hariott does, why you never come to see her of late."

"Tremendously busy," says Longworth; "of all merciless tyrants commend me to the reading public when a popular trial is going on."

"How goes the trial, Longworth?" inquires Frank. He is interested, but not to the point of attending. "They'll find her guilty, I suppose?"

"They can't very well find her anything else, since half-a-

dozen people saw her shoot him; but she'll be strongly recommended to mercy. She killed him, but she served him right."

"Dangerous doctrine, Laurence," says Miss Hariott. "How does the poor creature stand it?"

She appears half dazed. I wonder you don't go to see her, Miss Hariott. The poor soul needs a friendly word; it is hard lines for her just at present."

"Go to see, a murderess—*Mon Dieu!*" exclaims Marie, in faint horror.

Longworth lifts his thoughtful eyes. The music has ceased, and the black, gauzy dress and long, lemon-colored buds are at the window.

"Why not?" he says. "Good-evening, Mademoiselle Reine. Miss Hariott visits much worse people than poor Kate Blake every week of her life, but not one who needs a woman's presence, a woman's words, more than she. She wasn't half a bad girl, although she shot Allingham. Will you go, Miss Hester? I can obtain you admittance."

"Yes, I will go," Miss Hariott says, slowly, and Longworth gives her a grateful glance. She has shrunk a little at first; there is something terribly repugnant in the thought of facing a murderess. But she is a thoroughly good and charitable woman, as Longworth knows, as all the poor people of North Baymouth know, and when she does go, Kate Blake will have found a comforter and a true friend.

"What nice, enlivening subjects Longworth always starts," cries Frank, ironically; "for a death's-head at any feast, commend me to the editor of the *Phoenix*. I think we must ask him to our picnic, Mademoiselle Marie—if our spirits rise to any very boisterous degree of happiness, his pleasant raw-head-and-bloody-bone remarks will bring them down. What do you say?"

"Oh, ask Mr. Longworth by all means," says Miss Landedo, smiling graciously upon the gentleman in the chair.

"Anything in Baymouth without Mr. Longworth would be the play of Hamlet with the part of Hamlet left out."

"Consider yourself invited then, Mr. Longworth," says Frank, gravely, to an exclusive and *recherche* picnic on the morning of Tuesday, the eleventh instant, weather permitting, on Fishhawk Island. The fast sailing and commodious young steamer "Father of his country" will be at Stubb's wharf, precisely at half-past nine, ante-meridian. The celebrated string band of Baymouth is engaged for the occasion, and every one this side of forty can trip his or her ten light fantastic toes, from that hour till eight in the evening. Preparations are already proceeding on a scale of unprecedented magnificence, and all the élite, the beauty, and bravery, the skimmings of the cream of society, are expected to grace the festival. To none of these classes, I am well aware, can you, sir, put forth the slightest claim, but at the gracious solicitation of Miss Marie Landelle, I, sole proprietor and getter up, do by these presents invite you."

"Are you going, Miss Hariott?" says Longworth, "because if you are not——"

"I am going, Larry, and will protect you, or perish with you, from the sarcasms of this ruthless boy. Have you asked Mrs. Windsor, Frank?"

"Even that daring deed, madame, have I done. She's accepted, too. You could have knocked me down—yes, and dashed my brains out with a feather, when she said yes. If there's a breeze, and there is likely to be one at that hour, there's sure to be a comfortable short chop in the channel," says Frank with a demoniac chuckle. "Fancy Mrs. Windsor in a short chop! Fancy Semiramis, or Cleopatra, or the Queen of Sheba sea-sick!"

"I am afraid you are cruelly malicious, Monsieur Frank," says Marie. "Mr. Longworth, do you desert us already?"

"Must, I regret to say. May I charge you with my regards to Mrs. Windsor, Miss Landelle—I shall not have an

opportunity of seeing, her until we meet at the picnic? Tuesday, you say, Frank? This is Saturday, I believe."

"I believe it is," says Frank.

"How pleasant is Saturday night,
When we've tried all the week to be good,"

and failed mostly. Don't forget the date in the absorbing interest of the murder trial, if you can help it. I know you are perfect ghouls, you newspaper men, and dine and sup on horrors. You don't know the race, Miss Landelle, but it is my conviction that the reporter of a daily paper would rather commit a murder himself than not have one to report. Appropos of newspaper men, I've asked that prince of good fellows, O'Sullivan."

"Adieu, ladies," says Longworth, rising. He glances at the window; the face there looks dark and somber in the faint light. "Good-night, Mademoiselle Reine."

She bows, and when he is fairly gone, returns to the piano.

The sisters and Mr. Dexter have spent part of the afternoon and taken tea with Miss Harriott. Frank lies in a sort of dreamy swoon of bliss; the night is warm and lovely, he can recline on the short, sweet grass and "sigh and look, sigh and look, sigh and look, and look again," at the perfect face above him to his heart's content. Life is Elysium, Paradise is regained, to breathe is bliss—Frank Dexter is in love, Marie Landelle is here, and no other man is near to mar his rapture.

"O'Sullivan," says Longworth late that night, as they sit and smoke together in sisterly sociability on the stoop, "how many times have you escorted Mlle. Reine Landelle home from early church since last Wednesday week?"

"Never a time," responds Mr. O'Sullivan; "but I have introduced her to *M. le Curé* for all that, and there she was, singing like a mavis, last Sunday. Ye did well to tell me

she had a voice of her own, chief. I've heard Patti when she was in New York, and Nilsson, and Kellogg——"

"That will do," Longworth interrupts. "I, also, have heard those ladies, and I have heard Mlle. Reine. I'll go with you to church to-morrow, O, if you like."

"Will ye, faith!" says O'Sullivan with a grin. "Well, maybe there's hope for ye—there's pardon; they tell us, for the repentant reprobate early and late. There's not music at all the services—if ye would rather come early—and the choir and the organ *are* distracting to some people at their prayers——"

"Larry! Larry!" shrieks a discordant voice above them, "you're a fool, Larry! a fool! a fool! a fool!"

"Confound your croaking," says Longworth, with a scowl at Polly; "that bird will goad me into wringing her neck some day."

But Mr. O'Sullivan, lying back in his chair, laughs long and loudly.

"Upon me conscience, there never was anything more apropos," he says; "that parrot has the wisdom of a Christian."

Mr. Longworth goes to church on Sunday with his sub, and listens to a voice fresh and sweet, and clear as a skylark's soaring up in the choir. If he listens with half as much attention to the sermon, there can be no doubt he goes home benefited. There is appropriate matter in every word, and the text is: "For the love of thy neighbor worketh no evil—Love therefore is the fulfilling of the law." In the evening he goes to Miss Hariott's, and is neither surprised nor annoyed to find Mlle. Reine there before him. Her presence does not interfere with their friendly *tête-à-tête*, for she goes inside and sings soft French and Latin hymns, set to sweet Mozartian melodies, and they do their talking undisturbed, out among the roses. It is the time of roses, this lovely June weather; Reine has adorned herself with white

ones to-night—they become her, and it is not every one to whom it is given to wear roses.

"Stars of the beautiful sky of France,
Of the beautiful land of my birth,
I shall see you no more, with the ocean between,
At the uttermost ends of the earth.
Where my days still pass in sadness and sighs—
Stars of the beautiful sky of France,"

sang the voice in the dusky gloaming within, and the pathos sinks deep into the hearts of the listeners, and in listening they forget to talk.

The day of the picnic comes, and, remarkable to relate, it does not rain. The gods smile upon Frank's fête, there is not a cloud in the sky; only the long "mare's tails" that betoken settled weather, when the "Father of his Country" goes snorting and puffing from his dock. Flags and streamers float proudly on the breeze, the band plays its best and brassiest, the élite have mustered strong, and make a goodly show on the deck. Not one has failed; there is not a child on board, and only two matrons, Mesdames Windsor and Longworth. Miss Hariott, being unmarried, does not count among the elders; and Mrs. Sheldon, being young and pretty, does not count among the matrons. It promises to be a perfect picnic, and they go floating down the bay amid the cheers of the throng on the shore. Mr. Dexter, as master of the ceremonies, flushed of face, excited of manner, is everywhere at once, but chiefly in the vicinity of Miss Marie Landelle. Mr. Longworth reposes on a rug at Miss Hariott's feet and quotes appropriate poetry from *Punch*, as his youthful kinsman, meteor-like, flashes by.

"Bill Bowline comes, and he says to me,
He says to me, he says, says he,
'What is the rule of the road at sea?
I says to him, I says (that's me),
'The rule of the road, folks seem to agree,
Is to suddenly launch in eternity.'"

"It is one of Larry's nonsensical days," says Miss Hariott in a compassionate and explanatory tone to Frank. "You need not be alarmed. Wild horses could not draw a rational word from him, but he is quite harmless in these paroxysms I am used to him, and know how to manage him."

"He does not forget his charnel-house principles, though, even in the temporary aberration of his intellect," returns Dexter, with a look of disgust. "'Suddenly launched into eternity!' indeed! Keep him to yourself, Miss Hariott, if you can; idiocy is sometimes catching, and he may frighten the ladies."

Mr. O'Sullivan and Mlle. Reine, on two camp-stools, are chatting socially and cheerfully, as may be inferred from the gay laughter of the young lady. She has fraternized with the descendant of the Irish kings in a wonderful way. Miss Landelle is, of course, surrounded by a dozen or more adorers. Mesdames Windsor and Longworth, in two arm-chairs, sit and converse, and the former lady is everything that is gracious and condescending, an empress with the imperial purples and tiara laid aside. And the band plays, and the bay glitters, and "Youth is at the prow, and pleasure at the helm," and it is a day long to be remembered in the picnician annals of Baymouth.

An hour and a half brings them to Fishhawk Island. It is not a pretty name, but the island is a pretty place—large, tree-shaded, with dim, green woodlands, and long, white, glistening beach, "for whispering lovers made." There is a light-house, and one cottage—one only—the light-house-keeper's, and this makes things romantic. It is a tiny cottage, nestling under an arm of the light-house; and the keeper himself, a grim, Robinson Crusoe sort of man, stands watching these airy roisterers land with dreamy and philosophical eyes.

"An agreeable place to come and be a hermit," says a voice in Reine's ear; "every inducement offered—perpet-

ual solitude, profound loneliness, the ocean, the winds, and the sea-birds to accent the dreariness. Let me help you up this ascent, mademoiselle—the rocks are slippery.”

It is Mr. Longworth. Beyond saying good-morning, he has not addressed her before. She frowns slightly as he addresses her now, and her lips compress; but as without positive rudeness she cannot refuse, she is forced to accept the proffered help.

“Will you not like to go through the light-house?” he inquires, ignoring if he notices the frigidity. “One does not see a light-house every day, and the prevailing genius of the island is here to the left, chewing tobacco. Shall I ask him to guide us?”

“If you will, monsieur,” Reine replies, his cordiality fairly surprising her into assenting. A few days ago she sat in his hearing, and vowed to hate him her whole life long; now she is keeping her vow by taking his arm and doing as he tells her. As the incongruity strikes her she frowns again, then relaxes into a half smile.

Mr. Longworth addresses himself to the monarch of all he surveys:

“Yes,” that potentate says, “he is willin’. Thar ain’t nothin’ to see, but folks that comes allers does want to see it, specially ladies. Wall, yes, it is keinder lonesome, in winter now it’s uncommon, and of a winter’s night when the wind’s from the nor’ard, an’ makes a clean sweep of this yere island, an’ the waves roar right up a’most over the place, it ain’t noway cheerful. But he mostly takes it out in sleep, all through the winter, and somehow don’t mind. Wrecks, niss? Wall, sometimes of course, it’s the nater of things that there must be wrecks.”

A weird picture rises before Reine. A tempestuous winter night, the winds howling over this “sea-girt isle,” the snow falling in blinding drifts; the lamp up yonder gleaming through the wild, white darkness, the light-house keeper

asleep before his fire, and some fated vessel driving on and on to her doom.

She goes through the light-house with Longworth and Robinson Crusoe, up, up the spiral stairs to the very top, where the big lamp sits like a cherub "up aloft," and the breeze nearly tears the coquettish little hat off her head. Then down, and through the tiny three-roomed cottage, all at sixes and sevens, speaking pathetically in every dusty chair, in every untidy household god, of the abject creature Man sinks to, when he tries housekeeping alone.

"You ought to have a wife, my friend," suggests Mr. Longworth, "to put things straight and keep you company on howling winter nights."

"Wa-a-l," drawls doubtfully the philosopher, "I keinder don't know. Marryin', to my mind, is suthin' like dyin'—a man knows whar he is, but he don't know whar he's goin' to. I never did sot much store by wimmin folks even when I was a young chap, an' 'tain't no use tryin' speriments at my time o' life. I guess I'll suffer right on as I be."

Reine laughs—her coldness melts in spite of her—she has never been in so gracious a mood with her chosen enemy before. He takes advantage of it and shows her all the pretty lookouts, and miniature caves, and tiny inlets, and glimpses of green woodland where the song of the sea steals slumberously, and the strong salt wind is mingled with the scent of wild roses. He gathers her some ferns, and makes them and the wild roses into a bouquet, and in doing it tears his hand with a spiky branch—a long tear from which the blood flows.

"Oh!" Reine says, and turns pale.

"I don't want to stain my bouquet with blood—that would be an evil omen," he says. "Will you kindly wipe it off before it drops on the ferns?"

He draws out his handkerchief, and she obeys in all good faith; but Longworth's eyes are laughing as he watches her.

"'Tis not so deep as a well," he thinks, "'nor so wide as a church door, but 'tis enough, 'twill serve.' Thanks, mademoiselle. Now if you will do me the favor to accept my very humble floral offering——"

She hesitates a moment, bites her lip, reddens, but accepts. They pass out of the sylvan twilight into the sunshine and the midst of the merry-makers.

"I hate him—I will hate him my whole life long!" Little Queen," he thinks, looking down at her, "rash promises are dangerous things—foolish to make and hard to keep. You shall forgive me yet for refusing to rob you of your fortune."

The day is a perfect day, the picnic an ideal picnic. The dinner is good, the champagne is iced, the knives and forks have not been forgotten, the jellies are jellies, not shapeless masses, the pies are not squash, the ham is firm and rosy. Insane beings who care for dancing, with the thermometer at ninety in the shade, dance; the sane people who do not, drift away in twos and threes, but mostly in twos, and nobody knows anything of the whereabouts of anybody else, until the sun goes down like a wheel of fire, and purple and crimson, and orange and opal, pale away into primrose and drab. Then they drift together as they drift asunder, and there is a gipsy tea-drinking, which is merrier than all. Faces are flushed, noses are sunburned, the wind comes cool off the sea, and pound-cake and tea are as the nectar of the gods.

"It has been a consumedly hot day," says Mr. Longworth, pushing the damp, fair hair off his forehead. "My lords and gentlemen, you behold an utterly collapsed editor. Mrs. Windsor, I hope the thermometer has not been too many for you?"

"No, she likes heat," Mrs. Windsor replies, "it agrees with her." But she looks bored. He says it, and has registered a mental vow, to be invigiled to picnics no more. Music and moonshine, picnics and pleasuring, beyond a certain age, are mistakes.

Reine is beside her grandmother, but she has thrown away the roses and ferns—wild roses are not long-lived flowers. Marie reclines beside Mr. Longworth on the dry, wind-scented grass; she has been beside him all the afternoon in spite of every effort of Frank Dexter, and neither flush, nor freckle, tan, nor sunburn, spoil her pearl fair-skin.

They re-embark. The moon rising slowly from over there in the west, comes all silvery and shining out of the water. It is a full moon—this picnic has been arranged with an eye to her quarters, and three-quarters, and she leaves a trail of tremulous light behind her. The band is at it again, "A Starry Night for a Ramble;" it plays, and the moon and the melody make the young people sentimental—they lean over the side and stare pensively at the former. Reine stands among the moon-gazers, but Marie, who does not care for moonlight effects except on the stage, is promenading slowly up and down, listening to, and smiling indulgently upon Mr. Frank Dexter.

"Come here, Laurence," says Mrs. Windsor, and he goes over and takes a seat beside her. "I do not think we have exchanged ten words all day. What did you do with yourself the whole of this afternoon?"

She smiles as she says it. She knows very well who his companion has been, all this afternoon, much better than she does who was his companion this morning.

"I had the honor of pointing out to Miss Landelle the various points of interest and attraction about the island," he answers. "I only regret in my character of cicerone they were not more numerous and more romantic."

"Young people manufacture their own romance, do they not, Laurence?" She leans forward and lays one long, slim hand on his arm. "How do you like my granddaughter?"

Longworth laughs. The perfect abruptness of the question is enough to throw any man off guard, but that inscrutable face never betrays its owner.

"My dear Mrs. Windsor, is that not a somewhat embarrassing question? And there can be but one reply. Your granddaughters are young ladies whose great attractions the whole world must admit."

"I said granddaughter," retorts Mrs. Windsor, with emphasis, glancing at Marie. "My younger granddaughter certainly has little claim to beauty or attraction of any kind."

"That may be a question of taste," says Longworth, coolly, and looks in turn at the dark, quiet face, the dark, straight brows, the dark, shining eyes.

Robe that figure in white, he thinks, crown that dusk brow with a band of yellow gold, and she might stand as she stands now, for some Oriental princess.

"She is not pretty," Mrs. Windsor says, rather coolly; "and I think she has a bad temper. But Marie is, beyond dispute, a most beautiful girl."

"A most beautiful girl," the gentleman echoes.

"She is well-bred, her manners are full of repose, her disposition is amiable. She will be a wife with whom any man may be happy, of whom any man may be proud."

She pauses and glances at her again. Longworth bows, inwardly amused.

"Those facts are indisputable, madam."

"Have you thought, Laurence," the lady goes on, earnestly, "of our last private interview before those girls came — of the proposal I made to you then, and which you so peremptorily declined? I trust you have thought it over since, and thought better of it."

"I have not thought it over for one moment," he answers, promptly. "I never can or could think better of it. If I found it impossible to do it then, you may imagine, having seen the young ladies, how much more impossible it must be now."

"But is there no other way," she asks, with a peculiar smile, "in which these different and clashing interests can be

merged? Is there no other way in which what I offer may be yours, without injury to them?"

"Madam, your goodness overpowers me," says Mr. Longworth. He pauses a moment, his eyes follow hers toward the tall, slender form with the loose, golden hair and lovely, smiling face. "I cannot pretend to misunderstand you. Yes, there is one other way."

"If both my granddaughters were plain girls——"

"Impossible for Mrs. Windsor's granddaughters to be that," puts in the gentleman, parenthetically.

—"If, as I say, both these girls were plain and unattractive in any way, it is a suggestion I would never dream of making. But Marie is more than usually beautiful; she is gentle and graceful, and I do make it. It would please me very much, Laurence, to see Marie Landelle your wife—to know you as my son in reality, as you have long been in heart. I like the girl better than I ever thought to like Hippolyte Landelle's child. Will you think of this, Laurence, for my sake?"

"With pleasure, Mrs. Windsor—for your sake and for my own. Indeed," he says, and a slight smile breaks up the gravity of his attentive face, "I have thought of it myself before this evening. How long do you give me to make up my mind?"

"Oh, all that is entirely for you to decide. Fall in love at your leisure, by all means. I do not know how a man may feel, and at no time was I ever very susceptible myself, but I really cannot think it a difficult matter to fall in love with Marie."

"Frank does not seem to find it so at least. I think he was fatally hard hit from the first. You stand decidedly in Miss Landelle's light, madam, in offering her to me. In a pecuniary point of view Dexter is far and away a better match than I."

"My heiress can afford to dispense with that consideration

Yes, I know he has the fortune that was to be yours. I know ~~too~~ why, and for whom you lost it. Laurence, I cannot realize it. She is pretty in her way but unutterably insipid. What could you ever have seen in Mrs. Sheldon?"

"Ah! what?" Longworth laughs. "Now we are on delicate ground indeed. My Cousin Laura was a very pretty girl at sixteen, and in those days my taste had not been formed. She threw me over sensibly enough for a better fellow."

He rises as he speaks, turns as if about to go, and pauses, as if a thought had struck him.

"You are sure there are no prior engagements? I wouldn't care to poach on another man's manor. You are sure they will not object? It would be unpleasant for me to fall deliberately in love only to be a blighted being for the rest of my life."

She looks at him quickly to see if he is jesting. It is sometimes difficult for her to tell whether her favorite is in jest or earnest. His countenance at least is quite grave.

"I presume so," she answers rather haughtily; "they would hardly come to me as they did come if prior attachments or engagements existed."

"And you will drop them a hint of this little arrangement. It will only be fair to give them a voice in the matter, you know."

"Well—if you wish it, certainly, but——"

"I decidedly wish it," he interrupts, coolly, "a fair field and no favor on both sides. By-the-by, you don't restrict me to Mademoiselle Marie, I hope? A man naturally likes freedom of choice, and as I told you before, tastes differ. If by any chance——"

She looks at him in unfeigned surprise.

"Could you really think of that small, silent, dark, rather

plain girl? I cannot believe it. I should certainly, for your own sake, prefer it to be Marie——"

"My dear lady, how are we to tell that either will condescend to think of me twice? As to Mlle. Reine, I have it from her own lips, that she hates me, that she always intends to hate me, that she thinks me insufferably priggish and Pecksniffian, and for all I know she may be right. But it is my whim to have freedom of choice—with your permission."

"Mr. Laurence Longworth," says Mrs. Windsor, half-amused, half annoyed, "my opinion is that you are laughing at me all this while, and mean to have nothing to say to either. You know perfectly well that for the success of our scheme it would be much better not to say a word about it. Girls are proverbially perverse—tell them they are to do a certain thing, and they immediately go and do the reverse. But you shall please yourself. I will speak to them if you desire it."

"I do. And believe me I am more in earnest than you give me credit for. Here comes Mrs. Longworth. I resign in her favor."

Marie and Frank pass at the moment, and she smiles upon him. They both seem well amused; it would be a pity to spoil sport. A little farther down he sees Reine, no longer alone. O'Sullivan is by her side, and Mrs. Sheldon, and a few more, and this group he leisurely joins. Mr. O'Sullivan appears to have the floor, and is expatiating on the purity of Hibernian lineage and the desirability of the capital letter "O" by way of a prefix.

"It's the equivalent of the German *von* or French *de*—a patent of nobility in itself. Sure any one that ever took the trouble to read Irish history——"

"A trouble which nobody ever does take, my prince," says Longworth.

——"knows," continues the O'Sullivan, "that 'O' and

'Mac' are the prefixes of all the kings of the country from time immemorial. And there's the old rhyme besides :

"By Mac and O,
Ye'll surely know
True Irishmen alway.
But if they lack
Both O and Mac,
No Irishmen are they."

The town clocks are striking ten as they land, and all are weary and glad to be home. They have toasted their next merry meeting in claret cup, they have lauded Mr. Francis Dexter to the heavens, and sung boisterously in his honor,

"For he's a jolly good fellow,
Which nobody can deny."

And so, a brilliant success from first to last, Mr. Dexter's picnic comes to an end.

"It has been the happiest, the very happiest day of my life," he murmurs to Miss Landelle at parting, and he lifts her hand, as he says it, in right knightly fashion, and kisses it.

On Reine's table, when she enters her room, a letter lies—a letter in a man's hand, and post-marked London. Her tired face flushes as she sees it ; she tears it open and reads it eagerly, and kisses with shining eyes the words which are its last :

"Thine for ever and ever,

LEONCE."

CHAPTER XIII.

"AS THE QUEEN WILLS."

REINE," Marie Landelle says, "did you really enjoy the excursion yesterday? I ask because I heard you singing '*Ah! mon fils*,' this morning as you made your toilet. And it is time out of mind since I have heard you sing as you dressed before."

She is seated in an arm-chair, still wearing her pretty morning-gown, although it is close upon three, grandmamma's early dinner hour. Reine stands behind her, brushing slowly out the long, lovely hair—her daily task. She laughs frankly now.

"Undoubtedly I enjoyed it. The day was delightful, the water smooth, the company agreeable, and——"

"Mr. Longworth attentive. Please don't pull, Petite. You and he were together in close and confidential converse all the forenoon."

"Not especially confidential. How shall I arrange your coiffure to-day, Marie? Braided or loose as usual?"

"Braids, please, and put in the finger-puffs for a change. What did you talk about?"

"As if I could remember! What do people who meet at picnics always talk about? Only I must say this—M. Longworth's conversation as a rule is much better worth hearing than the average."

"Ah!"

"I don't know what you mean by '*Ah!*' You must have discovered that yourself. One may dislike a person and still do him justice."

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"But the other day justice was the very last thing you were disposed to do Mr. Longworth. Truly now, Petite, in all candor and honesty, do you really dislike him as you say?"

"Am I in the habit of saying what I do not mean, Marie?"

"Oh, you are frightfully truthful I admit, but rash judgments, Petite, are to be repented of. You said you hated Monsieur Longworth for refusing to rob us of our fortune, and for making our grandmother let us come. Now was that just or reasonable, I ask? And surely, hearing his praises sung so assiduously by Miss Hariott, and meeting him so frequently there, you must be inclined to err rather on the side of mercy than of prejudice by this time."

She looks annoyed, and Marie winces as her hair is pulled.

"I do not meet him so very often at Miss Hariott's. When he is there, they two talk and I play. I do not exchange a dozen words with him. Have I not told you he heard every word I said that first time we met there, when I declared I would hate him forever? It was unjust and unreasonable, as you tell me; but what you insinuate—that is another thing."

"He was at church last Sunday—I saw him, Reine," Marie says, plaintively. "How you *are* pulling my hair."

"I beg your pardon, dear, but it is impossible for me to help it, if you will talk," responds Reine, with decision; and Marie smiles to herself and gives up the point.

But when the red-gold hair is fashionably and elaborately coiffured, Reine herself returns to the charge.

"Marie," she says gravely, "Mr. Frank Dexter's attentions are growing far too pronounced. That poor boy is falling hopelessly in love."

"That poor boy, indeed! One would think she was his grandmother! You are getting a trick of your friend, Miss

Hariott, in talking. "Apropos, Reine, I don't half like your Miss Hariott."

"And I love her! It is the kindest heart, and she is a gentlewoman to her finger-tips. But we are speaking of Monsieur Frank Dexter."

"You are, you mean."

"And you ought to put a stop to it, Marie, you know *that*. He was so kind all the way out, he is so good-hearted always——"

"And pray what have I got to do with his good heart? One must amuse one's self, and if they fall in love, I cannot help it. One likes to be liked, and if it amuses him as well——"

"Amuses! Marie, you know he is in earnest. Oh! you cannot care for him, I know that well. I am not thinking of you, although you have no right——"

"Now, Petite!——"

"No right to flirt at all; but one day, poor fellow, when you throw him over——"

"Ah! *Dieu merci!* there is the dinner-bell," cries Marie, jumping up. "She cannot go on preaching in the presence of her majesty down-stairs. If you say another word, Petite Reine, I will drop Monsieur Frank and take up Monsieur Larry!"

"Do," says Reine; "I wish you would. I promise not to interfere there. He cannot hurt you, and I am quite sure you cannot hurt him. The man is as hard as stone."

It is quite evident Mr. Longworth is still not absolutely a foe-forgiver. Mrs. Windsor, with a more gracious face and bearing than usual, awaits them in the dining-room. It is the first time they have met that day. Madame has breakfasted in her room, and so has Miss Landelle. Have they recovered from the fatigue of the picnic? Marie, she is glad to see, has escaped the sun scathless, but Reine is sunburned. It is something quite out of the common for her to notice





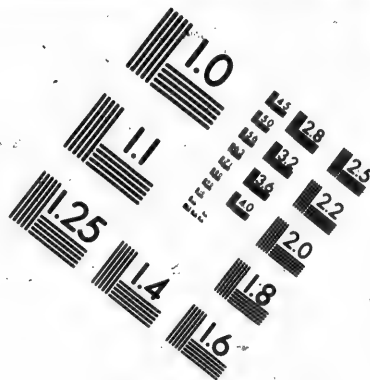
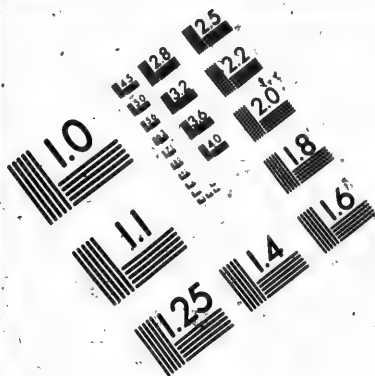
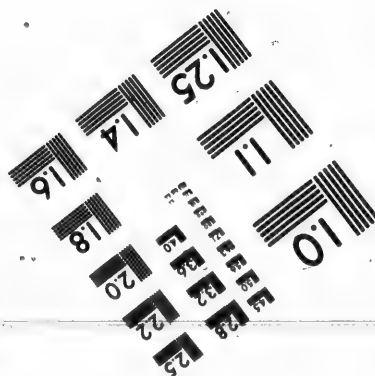
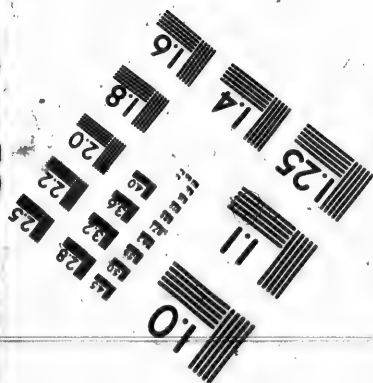
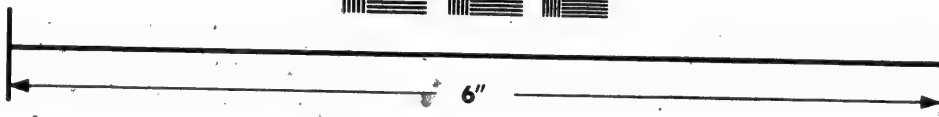
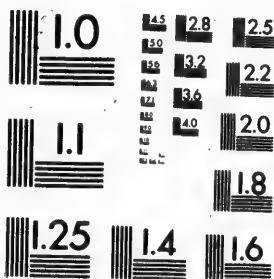


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her younger granddaughter at all, except in the most casual manner.

Dinner passes. Marie always exerts herself and makes talk in her grandmother's presence, and no one can do it more fluently or more gracefully, when she chooses to try. Reine never chooses. She knows Mrs. Windsor dislikes her, and if the truth must be told, cordially returns that dislike.

Dinner ends. Reine walks to the open window and looks out. The clear sunshine that has lasted so long has gone, the day is gray, windless, threatening rain. One or two large drops patter and fall on the flags, as she looks. As she stands dreamily gazing at the glimpse of lead-colored sky, seen between the trees, Mrs. Windsor in her slow, modulated voice, speaks.

"There is a matter of some moment upon which I wish to speak to you, young ladies," she begins; "it concerns the disposal of my fortune. Mademoiselle Reine, may I claim the honor of your attention?"

Marie, reclining gracefully indolent in a chair, turning over the leaves of an illustrated book, pauses and turns to her grandmother. Reine comes forward a step or two, and stands leaning lightly against the low marble chimney.

"I told you on the evening of your arrival," says Mrs. Windsor, "that I had made my will and disposed of all I possess to my friend, Mr. Longworth. That he declined the gift did not alter my resolution. But last night, coming home in the steamer, he and I talked it over, and a new idea, in which conflicting interests need no more clash, has dawned upon us both. He desired me to inform you of it. It is—that one of you two become the wife of Mr. Longworth."

Dead silence, dead blank, unbroken silence. Reine looks stunned, absolutely stunned. Then anger, amaze, defiance, flame up, and flash from her dark eyes. She looks at Marie, but except that Marie has grown a shade paler, that her delicate lips tighten and compress, her face does not change.

"I need hardly say Mr. Longworth has not fallen in love with either of you," pursues Mrs. Windsor, and as she says it she turns and almost pointedly addresses the elder sister; "that is an affair of the future, if necessary at all. Of course such a marriage reconciles any claim of blood you have upon me, with my own inclinations. When he has chosen, and is prepared, he will speak. Is it necessary for me to say what I desire your answer to be?"

Again Reine looks at Marie, fiery scorn and wrath in her face, passionate rebellion and defiance in her eyes.

"Speak! Fling back her insulting offer in her face!" says that flaming glance. But Marie's eyes are fixed on the white hands folded in her lap, her face tells absolutely nothing of what she may feel.

"To young ladies brought up on French principles, as I presume you both have been," continues grandmamma, in her most marked grand duchess manner, "to accept the husband chosen for you must present itself as the most proper and correct thing possible. Mr. Longworth, I need not say, possesses in himself all that is likely to attract the fancy of the most romantic girl. He is handsome, he is gifted, his manners are perfect—he will be a husband whom any lady may be proud of. He is well disposed to make one of you his wife, if you throw no obstacle in his way. And this, I think, educated as you have been, situated as you are, neither of you will be insane enough to do."

"Oh! this is shameful! shameful!" Reine gasps under her breath, her hands clenching, her heart throbbing. "Why will not Marie speak? Why does she not rise up, and say we will go out and beg, or starve, or die, sooner than listen to such degradation as this! And he—oh! I said well when I said I hated him! To make such a compact as this, to be ready to force one of us into marrying him because he is ashamed to take her fortune in any other way! He is almost too despicable for hatred and contempt!"

"AS THE QUEEN WILLS."

"You do not speak," Mrs. Windsor resumes, in slow surprise. "How am I to interpret this silence? Am I to think the proposition does not strike you favorably?"

"Marie!" Reine cries out, in a tone of concentrated anger and scorn; "why is it you do not answer? It is for you to reply that what madame wishes is utterly and absolutely impossible."

"Impossible!" Mrs. Windsor repeats, in the tone a sultana might use to an insolent slave—"impossible! What do you mean? Why impossible? It cannot—no, it cannot be that either of you has had the audacity to come to me already engaged?"

Marie looks across at her sister—one straight, level, warning look. Then she sits erect, and turns to the speaker.

"We are neither of us engaged, madame," she says, and as she says it, Reine turns and lays her face on the arm resting on the mantel; "it is the suddenness of this unexpected proposal that leaves us dumb: I have not been brought up on French principles," she says, a touch of scorn in her voice. "My mother's daughter was hardly likely to be, and with my father's example before me, his teachings on that point could hardly produce any very great effect. My sister has certainly been, and I see no reason"—again Marie glances steadily at her—"why she should object."

"I do not know that it is necessary for your sister to consider the matter at all," retorts madame, in her iciest voice. "I doubt if there is the slightest likelihood of her being put to the test. Do I understand you, then, Miss Landell, to say on your part that if Mr. Longworth does you the honor to propose for you, you will accept at once?"

Reine starts up. A flush, a faint, transient flush, passes for a second over the pearly fair face of Marie.

"Madame, this is very sudden. Will you not give me a little time——"

"You have known Mr. Longworth a fortnight. That is

amply sufficient. I am not in the habit of pressing my favors on any one. A simple yes or no will suffice. Which is it?"

"It must be yes, madame, if you command it."

"Oh!" Reine says, as if some one had struck her, and she turns, with clasped hands and crushed look, and goes back to the window.

"Understand me," pursues Mrs. Windsor, in frigid displeasure. "I know very little of your antecedents. You may both have had lovers by the score before you came here; but if I thought either of you were bound by tie or engagement of any sort, that one should instantly leave the this house and return to the man to whom she belongs. I have received your father's daughters because it seemed inevitable—if I fancied either of you were bound to men like him, you would not remain another hour with me."

"Oh!" Reine says again, under her breath, in the hard, tense tone of one in unendurable pain.

"One other thing," continues the lady of the Stone House, rising, "one last and final word on this subject. Whomever Mr. Longworth may choose, should she see fit to refuse, she will also see (if she retains the slightest good taste) the indispensability of providing herself at once with another home. Should he be accepted, however, there must be no reluctance, no playing fast and loose, no young ladylike humors or caprice. She must look upon the contract as indissoluble, and conduct herself as the affianced of an honorable gentleman, and as becomes my granddaughter."

And then—very erect, very majestic—Mrs. Windsor sails out of the dining-room and into her own.

There is silence for a time between the sisters. Reine still stands by the window; the rain is falling fast and dark now, and she looks at it with blank, stony eyes. After a moment Marie rises and crosses to her sister's side.

"Reine!" she says, but Reine neither lifts her eyes nor

responds. Reine, Petite," she repeats, and lays one hand caressingly on her arm.

The hand is shaken off, quickly, fiercely.

"Speak on," Reine says, in a voice of suppressed passion; "I hear."

"Are you angry?"

"Have I any right to be? What does it signify if I am? Am I the one whom madame most insulted? Am I the one to whom she spoke? Am I my sister's keeper? Is she not at liberty to be as cowardly, to tell as many lies as she chooses?"

"Thou art angry then, Petite?" She speaks softly, caressingly, in their own tongue, no whit moved by this passionate tirade. "This is worse than I ever feared. Petite, Petite, what are we to do?"

Reine looks up, her great dusky eyes afire.

"I know what I shall do. I shall do all I can to please M. Longworth—all—and if he asks me I will marry him!"

Marie shrugs her shoulders.

"And if he does me the honor, as madame hinted, to prefer me?"

Again Reine's eyes flash out, and a flush of red color darts across her face.

"Marie, if you let him fall in love with you, if you let him ask you, I will never forgive you to my dying day!"

"I foresee I am to lose my inheritance in any case," says Miss Landelle. "I lose it if Mr. Longworth sees fit to select me and I refuse, as you tell me I must. In that case madame ignominiously turns me out. I lose it if he selects you, for then all goes to you as his wife, and I am still a pauper. It would be better for me if I had stayed in London."

"Much better. I always said so. But if Monsieur Longworth selects me! Oh! *Mon Dieu!* that I should stand here and discuss such a possibility——"

"No such dreadful possibility," interrupts Marie coolly. "I like him, and would say yes, to-morrow if——"

Reine stamps her foot, perfect fury for the moment in her eyes.

"If you dare to say it!" A moment ago I despised you. I shall hate you as well as him if you say another word. Listen—if he asks me, and I take him, do you think it will be for his sake, or my own? No, no! it will be for yours, Marie—for yours alone. If his fear of the world's opinion would not let him rob us of all before, surely it will not allow him to rob you of your share. I will make it a stipulation that half shall go to you. But he will never think of me; it will be you, Marie, you, and then—*ma soeur*, my dearest, what then? For myself I do not care, but for you—for you——"

"Best of tempestuous little sisters," says Marie, and laughs softly, and stoops and kisses her. "Let us not discuss that. Let us hope for the best; let us hope you will be the one to find favor in the eyes of my lord the Sultan."

"The shame of it! the shame of it!" Reine says, in a stifled voice; "to think he can take us or leave us as he likes. How shall we ever look in his face again?"

"Very easily," Marie responds, calmly. "I can see nothing to be ashamed of. It is a family affair, as grandmamma—bless her!—says, quite correct and Frenchy. Monsieur speaks to the grandmother, the grandmother apprises mademoiselle of the honor done her, mademoiselle casts down her eyes and bows. One interview follows between monsieur and mademoiselle, and everything afterward goes on velvet. If he had chosen one of us—I mean chosen you last evening—since he spoke at all, it would have been better, but as he did not—— Reine, you are not crying?"

But Reine is crying, not in the least like an imperious Little Queen, but like a very self-willed, humiliated, mortified little girl.

"I was trying to be just to him—yes, to be friendly with him yesterday," she sobs, vehemently, "and see how he returns it. I remained with him, I took his flowers, I tried to be pleased—and now, this is my thanks for it all!"

She tries to run from the room, but Marie, who is laughing, catches, and holds her back.

"He is a wretch, a deceiver, anything you like; but one word, Petite. Do be more careful, I beg. You are so terribly outspoken and uncontrollable in your fiery tornadoes. You aroused madame's suspicions by your words and looks to-day—a little more and the whole horrible truth will come out, and then!" she breaks off with a gesture of despair, "*that* will be direst ruin indeed!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE EMBARRASSMENT OF RICHES.

MISS Hariott was not a lady of leisure; she led a very busy life, an earnest life, a useful life, in the service of all who needed service. Long ago, in the days of her youth, she had known sorrow, and death, and disappointment, deep and bitter; in later years she had known illness and poverty, in poverty's bleakest and most grinding form—indeed, for years, in the language of Mr. Mantalini, life had been nothing but "one dem'd horrid grind." Then had come fortune's first favor, and the trial and labor of life's best years ended, and affluence began. To many it would not have been affluence, but Hester Hariott's tastes were simple, her wants few. A rich relative had died, and among many large bequests, had left a few thousands to the patient music mistress and cousin he had hardly ever met. Her own years of suffering and toil had left her with a very tender and

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pitiful heart for all who toiled and suffered, and she fed the hungry and clothed the naked, and the sick and imprisoned she visited. So when, accompanied by Mr. Longworth, she presented herself at the town jail and asked to see the prisoner, Kate Blake, no official there was very much surprised, or offered any demur.

She found the woman—a young woman, a girl almost, and handsome, in a fierce and haggard way—lying on the bed, her hands clasped over her head, her eyes fixed in an unwinking sort of stare on the grated square of light, high up near the stone ceiling. Kate Blake knew Miss Hariott well, and knew why she had come, and did not turn on her fiercely, as she did on all other ghostly counselors ; she only made an impatient motion of shoulders and body, and turned away her head.

“What brings you here ?” she demanded sullenly, “I never sent for you. It’s manners to stay away until you’re asked to come, isn’t it ?”

“Why, Kate,” Miss Hariott answered, sitting down beside her, “is it the first time I ever came to see you ? It is certainly the first time you ever were rude to me. You used to seem glad to have me visit you, I think.”

“Used to,” the girl said, and covered her face with her hands.

She was not thinking of the speaker ; a rush of other memories bitterer than death filled her soul. It was not remorse for the deed she had done that was wearing her to a haggard skeleton, nor fear of the doom impending, but passionate, longing love and despair for the man she had killed. She poured it all out in one burning flow of words to Miss Hariott—Miss Hariott sitting smoothing the dark-tossed hair with soft, magnetic touch, and soothing her frenzied nerves with her low, tender, pitying voice—all her love, all her wrongs, all her madness, all her crime.

“Why do they try me ?” she cried. “Have I ever denied

it? have I not told them again, and again, and again that I killed him? And I am not sorry for it—mind, I am not sorry—I would do it again sooner than let him marry her. He promised to marry me—he swore it. Oh! he promised, he promised, and he left me, and went to her, and the wedding-day was named, and I think I went mad. I met him coming out of her house and I shot him. And now the days come back of long ago, and I see him again as he used to be, smiling and handsome, and always kind, until he almost seems standing beside me, and then I wake up and remember that he is dead, and that I killed him. But mind—mind, Miss Hariott!—she starts up in bed and wildly tosses back her hair—“I would do it again; I would, I tell you, sooner than let him marry her! Now you know the sort of sinner I am, and you won't convert me, though you're a good woman, and I like you better than the preachers. But you won't make me sorry for what I've done, and you may go and leave me as soon as you like.”

“I will go and leave you presently,” Miss Hariott answers, “but you will let me come back, won't you, Kate? You were a good girl once, a girl bright and full of promise, and I liked you so well. For the sake of our friendship you will let me come and visit you again, will you not?”

“Well, if you like,” Kate Blake answers, sullenly, but less sullenly than at first. “I wonder you care to come to such a place, and to such a wretch. No other lady would. But you're a good woman; you don't help people with fine words only, you give them what costs money, and that's what all your preaching people don't do. Come again if you like; it won't be for long.”

“And I will promise not to preach if I can help it,” Miss Hariott says, cheerfully. But though she does not preach, she kneels down for a moment, and half-whispers one pleading prayer: “Save me, O God, for the waters are come into my soul!” Sullenly, and turned away, the girl catches the

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words, and the eloquent cry finds an echo in her broken and desolate heart. And long after her visitor has gone, in the black, desolate watches of the night, they say themselves over, and over, and over, until they fall like dew, at last, on hard and burning ground.

As Miss Hariott opens her own garden-gate, she sees some one sitting in one of the garden-chairs, and catches the flutter of a pale summer dress. It is Reine, and she is reading, reading so absorbedly that Miss Hariott is leaning over her shoulder before she hears her.

"What has the child got? 'Friar Jerome's Beautiful Book.' Do you like Aldrich's poetry?—but I see by your face you do. Friar Jerome has a very tender and touching little moral, has he not?"

"And one which I think Miss Hariott practices," says Reine, closing her book. "You are the Lady Bountiful of Baymouth, I think? You look tired—where have you been now?"

Miss Hariott sits down, rather spiritlessly, for her who is always in spirits, and tells her.

"Poor soul!" Reine says, "it is very dreadful. Will they hang her, do you imagine?"

"Oh! no; labor and imprisonment for life, probably. She killed him, but there were extenuating circumstances. He was a villain—to her at least, though an honorable man enough in a general way, and as men of the world hold honor, and she loved him. Loved him so well that she shot him sooner than see him belong to another."

"It is very horrible," Reine says, slowly and thoughtfully, "and yet I think I understand her. I think I, under similar circumstances——"

"What! you would commit a murder, too?"

"No, no, what I mean to say is, that any woman who really loved, would rather see her lover dead than the husband of any one else. I think there can be no more poig-

nant despair. And as men are mostly false, the better way is not to love at all. Only those we hold in our heart can ever break it."

"Then how close a place Madame Windsor must hold in yours, for you look as if you were letting her, or something, or somebody kill you by inches. Little Queen, you look pale, and dark, and ill to-day. What is the matter?"

"Nothing. Yellow is my normal tint; if I look a trifle yellower to-day than usual, it is that I am probably a little more bilious. I have nothing to do, Mees Hariott, and I find that very hard work. I think I must be your almoner and go with you on your charitable rounds, two *sœurs de charité*, without the white cornette and black robe."

"You could do nothing better. But I wish I knew what was the especial trouble to-day. You promised to make me your mother confessor. If I am, you must not begin by hiding your secret sins and sorrows."

Reine laughs.

"But if it happens to be neither sin, nor sorrow? I would like to tell you, but then you are too fond of——"

"Laurence Longworth. Speak up, my dear. Yes, I am fond of him. What has he done now?"

"He has done nothing, at least nothing wrong. Does he ever do anything wrong? I must be very wicked, I suppose, by nature, for do you know I never liked perfect people. They are always pedantic and self-opinionated, and pharisaical, and dreadfully tiresome. If I had lived in the old Scriptural days, I would have been bosom friends with the publicans and sinners."

"H'm!" says Miss Hariott, "and this is the preface to something about Laurence Longworth!"

"And in novels," goes on mademoiselle, "one always hates the goody hero who is so pragmatic, and high-principled, and stupidly correct in all his doings, and never swerves the least little inch from the straight path, and take to one's

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"All very fine and very nonsensical," cuts in Miss Harrlott. "What has it to do, and how does it apply to our friend, Mr. Longworth?"

"I wish I were back in Rouen," goes on Reine, a tremor in the sweet, clear voice, and looking up with impassioned eyes at the patches of gold-gray between the trees. "I wonder if I shall ever be as happy again as I was in Rouen? My aunt was so kind—so kind, and I loved her, and Léonce so handsome and so gay——"

"And you loved *him*? Who is Monsieur Léonce?"

A soft roseate flush rises up over the dusk face.

"Ah, who?" she says, softly. "Some one whose like I never see here, some one you don't know and never will. But I was infinitely happy there, and now—and now——"

"You are infinitely miserable, I suppose. Thanks, mademoiselle, in the name of Baymouth, and all its people."

"I like you, and you know it, and I can never be infinitely miserable while Marie is near. But life is all Carnival or all Lent," says Reine; "and Lent has come, and seems likely to go on forever."

"Still," persists Miss Harrlott, "as I said before I say again—what has all this to do with Laurence Longworth?"

"Madame, need you ask? Do you not see grandmamma wishes one of us to marry him?"

"Well, and is that such a very terrible contingency? I think few women might ask for a fairer fate than to be Laurence Longworth's wife."

"How well you like him," says Reine, gazing at her curiously. "How well he seems to like you. I wonder, then——"

She stops, and laughs and blushes.

"Why I do not want to marry him myself?" suggests

Miss Hariott, looking straight into the dark, pretty eyes, with a smile that puzzles Reine. "My dear, my day of romance has come and gone. And I am seven years older than Mr. Longworth—I am thirty-nine years of age."

"You do not look it; you are handsomer and fresher than scores of girls of twenty. Marie, for instance, is a dozen years older in heart and a dozen times as *blasé* as you. And seven years is not so *very* much."

But Reine's voice falters over the white lie.

"It is just twice seven too much. Nevertheless, Mr. Longworth once asked me to marry him. I have no delicacy in telling you, because I think a day must come when I would tell you in any case, and besides, he would not care. He never was in earnest, you know, he never really meant it."

Reine sits up and stares.

"He asked you to marry him, and never really meant it. Madame, what a strange thing you tell me!"

"I hardly know how to explain," says Miss Hariott, laughing. "If I had been absurd enough to say yes, I would have been Mrs. Longworth to-day, and the great bugbear of your life—having one day to assume that title—would never have existed."

"I wish you had," interrupts Reine, with a sincerity there is no doubting.

"But it was impossible, and he knew it, and I knew it, and the liking that is so pleasant, would have been a very galling marriage bond by now. It was the most absurd proposal, I think, that ever was made."

She laughs once more, her clear, fresh, heart-whole laugh. The scene rises before her as vividly as if it had happened yesterday instead of nearly eight years ago. Both had but lately settled in Baymouth, but lately got acquainted, but had at once recognized each other as "two souls with but a single thought," and fraternized on the spot. There is such a thing

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as love at sight, there is also such a thing as friendship at sight. Such had been theirs; they were friends, close and sympathetic from the first moment their hands clasped. Longworth came to her regularly for counsel and advice; she wrote his book reviews, his dramatic and musical criticisms; she picked him up *on dits*, and scraps of poetry, and bits of romance, and current gossip of all sorts. He spent his evenings almost invariably with her in those days, and people whispered that it would be a match. The whisper came to Longworth's ears, taking him rather by surprise at first. But the more he thought of it, the more pleasing and plausible the idea seemed. Finally he spoke. Lying on the grass at her feet, a favorite attitude of rest after a long day's office work, smoking his cigar, listening to the wind in the trees, and the stitch, stitch of Hester Hariott's busy needle, he proposed.

"Miss Hariott," he said, "I wish you would marry me."

Miss Hariott was sitting, as has been said, placidly sewing. She was used to abrupt speeches after long silences, but the abruptness of this fairly took her breath away. Her sewing dropped in her lap. "Well!" she gasped, and then she laughed.

"Yes, I wish you would," continued Longworth, "I've thought of it a good deal lately, and meant to ask you before, but somehow it always slipped my memory. In the eternal fitness of things nothing could be more appropriate. I believe we were made for each other. Our opinions differ on nearly every subject, which opens an illimitable vista of agreeable controversy. You intend to live and die in Baymouth—so do I. Let us live and die together."

"Well, upon my word!" Miss Hariott manages to utter; "of all the audacious——"

"No, I don't see it. It is particularly reasonable. See here"—he raises himself on his elbow, cool, but quite in earnest—"let me prove it to you. A man marries to find an

agreeable companion for life ; could any companion be more agreeable than you are ? A man marries to find a helpmeet—you are that eminently to me. Don't know how I or the *Phenix* would get on without you. We like to be together, we never tire of each other, and I am uncommonly fond of you. You are clever—I couldn't marry a commonplace young woman"—he winces as he thinks of Totty—"though she were a very Venus. You are good, and I reverence good women. You are handsome—couldn't love an ugly woman, had she the wit of De Staël, the genius of George Sand. And it would bore me to live with a woman I didn't love. Those are my principles. Think it over, Miss Hariott, I won't hurry you, and let me know when you make up your mind."

And then Mr. Longworth languidly—for it has been a hot day, and there has been a press of work—resumes his cigar and his position on the grass, his hands clasped under his head, and listens with uplifted, dreaming eyes to a Katydid somewhere in the twilight piping plaintively to its mate.

Years have come and gone, and Miss Hariott has not yet made up her mind to reconsider that very unimpassioned declaration, and laughs now with as thorough an enjoyment as she did then while she relates it to Mlle. Reine. But Mlle. Reine is disposed to look at the matter seriously.

"I think Mr. Longworth was right. I think you two were made for each other. You have known him all his life, have you not ? Tell me about him—I am in a lazy, listening humor to-day, and even an enemy's history may prove interesting. Who is Monsieur Laurence Longworth ? Who is his father ? Who is his mother ? Has he a sister ? Has he a brother ? He looks like a man who may have had a story."

Miss Hariott laughs.

"Shall we call in Candace ? She has been his biographer to me. She tries to picture him to me as she saw him first

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—a little fellow of ten, with long, golden curls, dressed in black velvet, and wearing a crimson sash, tall boots with red tassels, and a little velvet cap with a golden band. Imagine it."

"Impossible!" laughs Reine. She thinks of the grave, gray figure in the felt hat, the editor in his dingy sanctum, the man old, and cold, and self-centered—lifts shoulders and eyebrow despairingly, and laughs once more. "Oh, impossible! You describe a fairy prince in a burlesque, not that solemn matter-of-fact Mr. Larry."

"Nevertheless Mr. Larry was a prince in a small way in those days, and his uncle had brought him out in that dress to show him his kingdom and his subjects. In other words, he had adopted the little lad, and displayed him to his admiring servants as their future master. And old Mr. Longworth is a very rich man."

"Then how comes our heir to be a hard-working editor, our butterfly a caterpillar, our prince to have lost his principality, and be here in exile with none so poor as to do him honor?"

"My dear, the reason that has worked all the mischief in the whole world, from the days of Eve down—a woman."

Reine is vividly interested at once. She rises on her elbow, and looks eagerly at Miss Hariott.

"A woman! Monsieur Longworth in love! Oh, more and more impossible! The first might be imagined—this never."

She listens, profoundly interested in the story her friend tells. She may not like the man, but where is the girl that does not like a love story?

"So!" she says, slowly, "he really resigned a fortune for love. That cold, cautious, calculating man! I cannot understand it. And so two ladies—you and Madame Sheldon have really refused him!"

"Do you like him the less for that, Little Queen?"

"We all prize most that which is most prized by others," re-

sponds Mlle. Reine, coolly. "I certainly would not (if I liked him at all) like him the less for the story you have just told. He was not then the *bon garçon* of the Sunday-school story that he is now, and so I prefer him. But I cannot realize it."

No, it is impossible, either in the character of fairy prince, all black velvet and crimson tassels, or as ardent lover standing up flushed and impassioned, and yielding a fortune for a lady's favor, or as youthful poet writing melodious verse or romantic novel. Always before her there rose a vision of a crowded, jostling deck, excited people, scampering in frantic haste everywhere, and elbowing two friendless girls, and then a tall, well-built figure, in a gray business suit, coming easily toward them, and taking possession of them as coolly and deliberately as though they had been two parcels left to be called for. There was power certainly in that tranquil face, plenty of self-will and self-reliance, and a certain beauty in the clear, cold, critical eyes. A clever man that face bespoke him, a talented lecturer, a successful editor, a shrewd man of business, with a steady eye to the main chance—but prince, poet, lover—Oh, surely never!

"Long ago," says the voice of Miss Hariott, breaking in on her reverie, "Candace was a slave on old James Longworth's place, and the one ambition of her life was freedom. When Laurence came north, and set up in life for himself, he remembered Candace, who had petted him in his boyhood, and sent her the money that purchased her freedom. She came here, he sent her to me, and with me she has remained ever since. Now, wait one moment, and I'll unearth Larry's poems."

She goes into the house and returns with a small volume, all blue and gilt."

"This, Mademoiselle Reine, is 'Falling Leaves,' by L. L.—well named, I am sorry to say, for it fell remarkably flat indeed! Prepare to be victimized, for I am going to read

you one of these 'Falling Leaves'—not that I do not think them rather pretty myself, but then I'm a sentimental old maid.

"Before you begin," says Reine, demurely, "let me mention that I see the top of a certain straw hat down yonder among the trees, and I think the talented head of your poet is under it."

"That makes no difference whatever. Now listen :

" 'The roses hung from the garden wall,
With a low-sung song, and sweet——' "

"Were the roses singing?" inquires Longworth, sauntering up; "rather a new floricultural fact, that, isn't it?"

He bows to Reine, and takes a seat. The reader frowns, but resumes :

" 'And my heart kept time to the summer rhyme,
And the patter of little feet.' "

"Did the feet belong to the roses?" persists Longworth. "If they could sing, why not walk?"

"Will you hold your tongue, Mr. Longworth?" demands Miss Hariott, with asperity. "Your remarks, sir, are as silly as they are uncalled for.

" 'But now when the summer is dead and gone,
No fireside is for me,
And I sit alone, with a dreary moan,
By the lonesome wailing sea.' "

"If the summer is dead and you have no fireside, I would strongly recommend you not to sit moaning too long by the wailing sea, or you will have an attack of acute rheumatism," interrupts the editor of the *Phoenix*, and Miss Hariott shuts up the book in silent displeasure.

"There never was a more necessary prayer than Deliver me from my friends," goes on the gentleman. "What

wrong have I ever done you, Miss Hariott, that you should take revenge in this cold-blooded fashion, and poison the youthful mind of Mlle. Reine? I had hoped there was not a copy of my youthful rubbish extant. I know I bought up all I could lay my hands on, and made a bonfire of them; and now, without provocation on my part, while I innocently look upon you in the light of a friend and well-wisher, you fiendishly thrust this proof of by-gone idiocy in my face. In the words of the immortal Pecksniff, have I indeed been cherishing an ostrich in my bosom all these years, that it turns and stings me now?"

"The verses are not so bad," says Miss Hariott. "Rather nonsensical, perhaps, but musical. The average of what is called poetry nowadays possesses more sound than sense, more jingle than judgment. Still I will temper justice with mercy, and inflict no more of it on mademoiselle at present."

In the interval that has elapsed since the picnic, Mr. Longworth and the Demoiselles Landelle have met daily. He is eminently a social man, despite those long fits of silence to which he is subject, and many homes are open to him in Baymouth. Of these it has already been said he most prefers Mrs. Windsor's and Miss Hariott's. At the Stone House he is tolerably certain of seeing both young ladies; at the white cottage he may confidently count in certain hours upon finding the younger. The embarrassment, natural to their situation, appears to be unfelt, at least, by Mr. Longworth or her sister. He enters their presence with the debonnaire ease that sits so naturally upon him, and converses with Mrs. Windsor on topics of mutual interest, as though grandmamma alone existed, and there were no such things as granddaughters in the scheme of creation. Or he improves his French under Marie's laughing tuition, or he courteously asks Mlle. Reine for a song, and renders by his tact an awkward situation as little awkward as may be. But as he lies back in that great

arm-chair, his blond head resting against its blue back, his quiet eyes seeing everything, while seeming to note nothing, Reine catches the steadfast look with which he examines her and her sister—cool, impartial, almost ironical—measuring, as she feels, their worth and fitness, or unfitness, for the honor of his choice. It stings her pride like a whip; she burns and tingles under it with very shame. There are times when it requires an effort of will not to rise and denounce, and defy and refuse him, and rush from the room and the house, and return no more. He is considering well, no doubt, which he will choose and take as the unpleasant but inevitable incumbrance of a great fortune; it is the embarrassment of riches, and he is slow in making up his mind.

She rises now to go, having lingered sufficiently long to prevent his thinking she flies at his approach. She is far too proud for that. He does not offer to go with her, and she is grateful to him for that much at least. He returns her parting and distant bow, and sees her depart, the same attentive and watchful look in his eyes the girl has often detected. He does not remove it until she is out of sight.

"A thoroughly good little girl," Miss Hariott remarks; "a tender heart, a clever head, a pure soul——"

"And an uncommonly peppery temper," interrupts Longworth; "the pride of the duse and the self-will of a—woman."

"I like her none the less for that. Neither do you, Mr. Longworth. We know what sort of nonentities girls without pride or self-will are. A moderate amount, of course, there certainly is a line."

"Ah, but there's the rub—how much is a moderate amount, and where is the line? Now I am disposed to be friendly with Mlle. Reine. Is it her proper pride and self-will that impel her to fly from me on every occasion, as if I were his Satanic majesty, horns, hoofs, and all?"

"That is prejudice—she will see its injustice one day. How do you progress with the lovely Marie?"

"The lovely Marie is as angelic of temper as of face—she is everything the heart of man could desire. If your little gipsy favorite were only half as amenable to reason——"

He stops and stoops to pick up something. It lies on the grass near him, and proves to be a photograph, the photographed face of a young and eminently handsome man.

"What celebrity is this," he asks; "or is it for its intrinsic beauty you keep it, or is it some one you know?"

He passes it to Miss Hariott. She has a mania for collecting photographs, autographs, and relics of literary and artistic people; the little house is littered with albums full of them.

"This is none of mine," she answers; "it must belong to mademoiselle."

The pictured face of the gentleman—the face, beyond doubt, of a Frenchman—is, without exception, the most beautiful Miss Hariott has ever seen. Underneath there is written, in a manly hand:

"Wholly thine—LÉONCE."

"Léonce," Miss Hariott says; "a French name and a French face. Did you ever see anything half so handsome? Yes, Mlle. Reine must have dropped it, pulled it out, probably, with her handkerchief."

"Here she comes to claim missing property," says Longworth.

As he speaks Reine hurries up the walk, a little flushed with heat, and haste, and excitement.

"I dropped something. Oh, you have it!" The color deepens in her dusk cheeks as she holds out her hand. "Thanks." She pauses a second and puts the picture in her pocket. "It is my aunt's son, Léonce Durand," she says, and she lifts her head as she says it, and there is an involuntary ring of defiance in her tone. Then she turns once more and goes.

"Her aunt's son! Does she mean her cousin?" inquires Longworth.

"I presume so; I have heard her speak of him before. He must be a remarkably handsome young man."

"'Wholly thine—Léonce.' Affectionate for a first cousin," says Longworth, and Miss Hariott looks at him keenly for a moment. Then she learns forward and speaks.

"Larry, I am curious to know. Will you marry one of Mrs. Windsor's granddaughters?"

He laughs.

"Who has been telling you?" he asks.

"Oh, it is patent to every one—he who runs may read. You intend to marry one of them?"

"Being impracticable to marry both, yes—if she will have me."

She looks at him thoughtfully, wistfully, and long.

"I wonder if you are in love?" she says, as much to herself as to him.

His face wears its most impassive expression. It tells her nothing. But the smile that comes slowly relieves her.

"I am your friend," she says. "I wish you well, and I do not wish you to marry without love—deep, and lasting, and true, as it is in you to love."

"And as I will if I marry. Without it I will ask no one, not even one of Mrs. Windsor's most charming granddaughters. And I mean to ask one of them. You wish me God-speed, do you not?"

"With all my heart, if it be Reine."

"Here are visitors," he says and rises. "No, I won't stay and meet them. Good-night."

And so he goes, with the shadow of a smile on his face, and Miss Hariott is left perplexed and provoked, to ask herself again and again, "Which is it to be?"

CHAPTER XV.

"BY THE SWEET SILVER LIGHT OF THE MOON."

DAYS go by, weeks go by, July comes in its splendor to Baymouth, and still Miss Hariott says to herself, as she has said from the first, "Which is it to be? It seems the most impracticable, the most hopeless thing in the world, if Reine is the one he wants."

But whether or no Reine *is* the one, it is impossible to tell. No one can tell; not Mrs. Windsor, growing anxious but hiding her anxiety well; not Reine, cool and impassive; not Marie, smiling and serene. The former young person puzzles Hester Hariott nearly as much as the gentleman—cold apathy has replaced passionate rebellion, utter indifference more hopeless than active dislike. She never avoids him, she talks to him and of him quite freely, but with a serene composure that should be the most exasperating thing on earth to a lover. A lover in no sense of the word does Mr. Longworth appear—perhaps the rôle of sighing swain is not consistent with editorial dignity. They meet, they part, they talk, they walk, they sail, they ride, they dance, they laugh together; and the more they see of each other the farther off all idea of tender sentiment seems. And yet, somehow—the wish being father to the thought—Miss Hariott cannot get it out of her head that Reine is the one. She has learned to love very dearly the girl with the brown, earnest eyes and thoughtful face—there are times when she doubts, distrusts, almost dislikes Marie.

The summer days pass pleasantly in Baymouth; there are perpetual picnics, and excursions by land and sea, moonlight sails down the bay, boating parties, strawberry festivals, and

all the innoxious dissipation that goes to make up the gayety even of a large country town. The ladies Landelle are in request everywhere. Every masculine heart over fifteen, in Baymouth, beats rapturously with love for Marie, and those sweet, flitting smiles of hers are bestowed with perfect and maddening impartiality upon all. Two proposals have been made and rejected, rejected very gently, but so decidedly that one despairing youth fled from the home of his boyhood, and rushed with his anguish upon him to the uttermost wilds of Montana. Among these stricken deer perhaps none were further or more hopelessly gone than poor Frank Dexter. The middle of July finds him still lingering in Baymouth, unable to tear himself from the side of his enchantress, unable to pay that visit, so long deferred, to his southern home. Letters full of impatience and expostulation come weekly from his mother, commanding, exhorting, entreating his return; but Frank cannot go. The yacht is his excuse—the yacht already making a brave show in her dock; but love, not schooners, holds Dexter. He fears his fate too much to put it to the touch, he is furiously jealous of every other aspirant, and Longworth he fears and hates with an intensity that has something quite fratricidal in it.

"Longworth," he says gloomily, one evening—Byronic gloom and misanthropy sits permanently on Mr. Dexter's brow of late—"is this beastly story they are circulating through Baymouth true?"

"What beastly story?" inquires Mr. Longworth, lazily, leaning back in the boat.

The cousins are out in a boat, Frank is rowing, and it is a hazy July twilight. They are not often together of late, Mr. Dexter shunning Mr. Longworth as though he were a walking pestilence; but on this occasion he has pressed for his company on purpose to "have it out." The editor reclines in the stern, steering, smoking, looking lazy, placid and happy.

"You must have heard," says Frank, with a short growl; "beastliest scandal I believe ever was invented. It's about you and"—Mr. Dexter pauses with a gulp, as if the words choked him—"the Misses Landelle."

"What about me and the Misses Landelle? Mind what you're about, Baby; here's a tug-boat coming."

"They say that Mrs. Windsor has offered you your choice, and they've consented, and are only waiting for you to throw the handkerchief. It's too diabolical. I can't believe it!"

"Disbelieve it, then."

"But is it true?"

"I told you to mind what you were about!" cries Longworth, starting up and holding the rudder hard; "do you want the tug to run into us and send us to the bottom?"

"By Heaven, Longworth, if this infernal story is true, I don't much care if she does!" passionately exclaims Mr. Dexter.

"Don't you, dear boy? But I flatter myself I'm of some service to king and country, and don't want to see the bottom of Baymouth Bay to-night, at least. Now, what was it you were saying? Oh! about the Mesdemoiselles Landelle. Did you inveigle me out here on the wasty deep to ask me this, Baby?"

"I did. And I want an answer. It's my right, and I demand it."

"Your right, dear boy? Don't seem to see it——"

"I love Marie Landelle!" cries Frank with suppressed passion. "I mean to ask her to be my wife. Must I wait until she has refused *you*?"

"You think she will refuse me—when I ask?"

"I think so. I hope so. Sometimes I am sure of it. And then again——" He breaks off, and clenches the oars, and pulls furiously for about five minutes. While the spurt

lasts Mr. Longworth has to look after the rudder, and silence perforce reigns, but it ends, and Frank rests on his oars, and lets the boat drift.

"Larry," he says, in something like his old frank voice, "You used to be a good fellow, we use'n't to be half bad friends. Come! speak up! You have been in love once yourself, and gave up a fortune for a woman's sake. You're not in love now, I'll swear, but you cannot have forgotten that time. You know how it is, and how I feel, and I want an honest answer as from nian to man. Do you mean to ask Marie Landelle?"

There is a pause. Longworth looks with kindly glance at the lad's flushed face, and excited eyes. He has grown thin and rather haggard these last weeks, and the old boisterous, booming laugh no longer echoes through the halls of the Hotel Longworth.

"My dear boy," he says, "of what use will it be even if I say no? You have a full dozen rivals."

"Burton, Morris, Graham, and others," Frank answers, excitedly. "I am not afraid of any of them. Longworth, I am afraid of you."

"Why of me? They are all richer men, younger men ——"

"Pshaw! as if youth were anything but a drawback; but that is not the question. You are backed by her grandmother's authority, and if you ask she must accept you whether or no."

"A most humiliating suggestion. Besides, if she refuses me, and accepts you, she may defy her grandmother. Mrs. Francis Dexter can dispense with dowry."

"This is not the question—don't shuffle and evade, Longworth!" cries Frank, passionately. "Will you or will you not ask Marie Landelle to marry you?"

"I will—not!"

"Not! You mean that, Larry?"

"I mean that, Baby. And I keep my word, as you may

know. Go in and win, and my blessing upon your virtuous endeavors."

"Shake hands on that!" exclaims Frank, leaning forward, his eyes gleaming with delight. "Dear old boy, what a trump you are! And, by George, what a load you've lifted off my mind."

They clasp hands, firm and fast, for a moment. Dexter's face is exultant, Longworth's kindly, but a trifle compassionate.

"So hard hit as that, dear boy? Take care, my Baby; it's not safe. It's not good policy even in a game of this sort to risk one's whole fortune on a single throw. If one wins one is certainly rich for life; but if one loses——"

"With you out of the race I fear nothing!" cries triumphant Frank.

"You think nothing remains then but a quiet walk over? Well, I don't want to croak, and I wish you good luck, but girls are kittle-cattle, as the Scotch say. And she's a coquette, Frank, in a very subdued and high-bred way I own, but still a coquette; and where one of that profession is concerned, 'you can't most always sometimes tell.' Take care!"

"But, Larry, you must have observed that her manner to me is different from her manner to other men. She goes with me oftener, she seems to prefer——Oh! hang it, a fellow can't tell, but you know what I mean. Would she encourage me only to throw me over?"

"Who knows? Have you ever read the Widow Bedott?"

"To say why gals act so and so
Or not, would be presumin';
Mebbe to mean yes, and say no
Comes nateral to wimmin."

"Mlle. Marie seems as clear as crystal, limpid as a sunny brook; but try to see the bottom, and mark if you don't

find yourself baffled. The crystal depths obscure themselves all in a moment, and whatever is below remains hidden. Mind, I don't say she has anything to hide, but if she had she would know how to hide it. She's a clever girl, Frank, and I wouldn't count too securely on the coveted Yes until—well, until it is actually spoken."

"All must take their leap in the dark, why should not I? But, Larry, if you don't mean to propose to Marie—and, by Jove, how you can look at her and not madly fall in love with her, is what I cannot understand—do you intend to propose to——"

"My Baby," says Mr. Longworth, placidly, but with a certain decision of tone that the other understands; "as Mr. Guppy says, 'there *are* chords in the human heart,' and it is not for tall boys to make them vibrate. I have told you I am not going to offer myself to Mlle. Marie; that is sufficient for you. Now let us return, for I presume you have finished with me for the present, and I am due at Madame Windsor's."

"So am I. Croquet, isn't it?"

And then Mr. Dexter resumes his oars, and with a face of cloudless radiance rows to land.

This same sunny afternoon, but a few hours earlier, has seen Miss Hariott and Mlle. Reine walking slowly through the hot and dusty streets of North Baymouth, the din of the huge throbbing machinery in their ears, its grit and grime in their eyes. The narrow streets in this part of the town lie baking in the breezeless heat; matrons sit at their doors, children in swarms trip up the unwary pedestrian on the sidewalks. Reine goes with Miss Hariott very often now, and the dark French face is nearly as well known as Lady Bountiful's own.

Miss Hariott makes a call to-day she has never made with Reine before. It takes her to a tall tenement-house, and up three pairs of stairs, into a room tidy and comfortable, the

floor carpeted, the windows curtained, a canary singing in one, flowers filling the other. A girl sits in a low rocker sewing, a very old woman is kneading biscuits in a pantry. The girl rises with an eager smile, and, as she turns to greet her visitors, Reine sees with a thrill of pity that she is blind.

"I thought you had forgotten us, Miss Hariott," the blind girl says, brightly. "Grandmother has been wondering if you were gone for another European trip. Gran, here is Miss Hariott at last. You must excuse her, please, she grows deafer every day."

"I have brought a friend to see you, Emily," says Miss Hariott taking a chair. My friend Emily Johnston, Made-moiselle Reine Landelle."

"Ah! ma'amselle"—the blind girl holds out her hand, and turns so directly to Reine that it almost startles her—"I am glad to see you. I can't really see you, you know, but I always say that. I have heard of you so much."

"Heard of me!" Reine repeats.

"Why, yes," says Emily, laughing. "You go about with Miss Hariott, don't you? and then people drop in and talk about the French young lady, with the pretty foreign ways, and sweet voice, and kind words for every one. And when Mr. Longworth comes I ask him no end of questions. Bless you! we've sat and chatted about you by the hour. He doesn't start it himself, you know, but he answers my questions. And I'm sure I hope you'll come often."

Miss Emily Johnston, having lost the use of her eyes, has by no means lost the use of her tongue, and chats away with a vivacious volubility not infrequent in the blind. She holds up the work she is busy upon—a sheet, Reine sees.

"The first half-dozen nearly done, Miss Hariott," she says. "You may send me some more whenever you like. Mr. Longworth gave me a dozen handkerchiefs to hem for him the other day, so I have sewing enough for the present. Ma'amselle Reine, how do you like Baymouth?"

Mademoiselle answers more and more puzzled. They rise and go presently, and the blind girl shakes hands with both, and presses ma'amselle to come again with a frank cordiality there is no resisting.

"Well?" Miss Hariott says, when they are in the street, and smiles at Reine's puzzled face. "You would think she had not a care in the world, and for the last two years she has been, as you see, stone blind."

"Who is she? How was it? Why does she talk in that way of Mr. Longworth? What is he to her?"

"Her best friend in the world. She was in the *Phenix* office almost from the first; she addressed wrappers and did light work of that sort, and was the sole support of her old grandmother for years. Then she caught small-pox in some way, was taken to the hospital, remained there two months, and came out as you see her—perfectly blind."

"*Mon Dieu!* How terrible!"

"Terrible indeed. There seemed nothing but starvation or the poor-house for Emily and her grandmother, and I think of the two starvation would have been preferable to both. She bore her blindness bravely, but she broke down at the thought of the alms-house. Then Mr. Longworth came forward, and in the most matter-of-fact, prosaic, business-like way, said that as she had been in the office so long and worked so well, she had a claim upon the *Phenix* which that noble-minded bird could not disregard—her salary should still go on as before. It was kind of him no doubt," says Miss Hariott, in an impartial voice, "but really nothing more than his duty under the circumstances."

"Kind of him!" exclaims Reine, and then she stops and compresses her lips.

"Of course," says Miss Hariott, coolly; "do I not say so? He has continued to pay it ever since, and will go on indefinitely. Emily's gratitude is boundless, but still she partly earns the money, for she addresses wrappers still, only

at home instead of at the office, and sews for me and for him when we want her. She is quite cheerful and resigned, as you see, having, as she says, too many blessings left to 'fly in the face of Providence' for the one blessing He has taken from her."

There is silence for a little, and then Reine speaks in a low and broken voice.

"And I, with sight and home and sister left, repine and rebel against the good God, grieve and mourn for the liberty and the home and the friends I have lost. Oh! my friend, how thankless, how full of ingratitude I am! To go through life always in night, to see no sun, no lovely world, no flowers, no sea, no summer! And yet to kiss the hand that strikes."

"Do you know Mrs. Browning's poem, Reine?" says Miss Hariott. "There is one verse I like to think over, when the past, with all its losses and crosses, comes back to me:

"I bless Thee while my days go on,
I thank Thee while my days go on;
Through dark and death, thro' fire and frost,
With emptied arms and treasure lost,
I bless Thee while my days go on."

They go home through the sunset almost in silence. At Miss Hariott's gate they part.

"Are you coming to-night?" Reine asks.

"To the croquet-party? Of course not, child. The idea of playing with little red and white balls at my time of life! No, I expect a friend or two this evening. If you see Frank Dexter, tell him I want him to come and see me to-morrow without fail. The lad goes moping about no more like himself than I am like a statue of Niobe. I don't know what's come to him—yes I do, too," says Miss Hariott, rubbing her nose in a vexed way, "and I like the boy, and it worries me. His mother wants him. I had a letter from her to-day

asking me how he is, carrying on, and threatening to come and fetch him if he does not report himself speedily at headquarters. His continued absence annoys old Mr. Longworth, and that ridiculous fortune we hear so much of fluctuates in the balance. Send him to me, will you, Little Queen?"

Reine promises and goes, troubled and anxious about many things. As she enters the garden she finds Marie all in white, and looking seraphic, her "sweet face in the sunset light upraised and glorified," gathering flowers for a bouquet.

"Every one will be here in half an hour, Petite," she says, "and here you are, dusty and worn and disheveled as usual. How can you fancy running about those ugly streets in the hot afternoon sun, instead of staying sensibly at home and improving your time and your temper by a siesta? I am sure you and Miss Hariott must bore the poor people dreadfully with your perpetual visits. Wear pale yellow to-night, dear Petite, and this red rose in your hair."

"Come up with me, Marie," says Reine, and the elder sister puts her arm about Reine's slim waist and goes.

"Now, then, Petite, what is it?" she demands, seating herself in the easiest chair; "what is the latest indictment? You look as if the jury had found a true bill. What have I done—for I see a sermon in your eyes. What a pity you can't inflict all your preaching on your pensioners and leave poor me in peace."

"It is a sermon you have often heard, at least," answers Reine; "I wish you would let Frank Dexter alone."

Marie laughs.

"That poor Monsieur Frank! If he knew how often we discuss him he surely would be flattered. Have I not told you again and again that I do nothing? but I cannot help his falling in love with me. Other men do the same, and you find no fault."

"I have, I do, I always will," Reine cries passionately.

"Marie, Marie, this is worse than thoughtless. He was so kind, and I like him so much, and now he is miserable and must always be miserable. Oh! it is a shame, a shame!"

"*Mon Dieu!* Only hear her! Heartless! Miserable! One would think I was a monster! Shall I order him out of Madam Windsor's house? shall I refuse to answer when he speaks? shall I get a mask and wear it while he chooses to remain in this dreary town! I tell you I am not keeping him here—it is his yacht."

All this Marie says, lifting eyebrows and shoulders together, and making a very becoming and very French *moue*, but with the sweetest temper all the while.

"Listen, Petite," she goes on caressingly, "it won't hurt Mr. Frank, this absorbing passion—he is only a boy. I am sorry to hurt him, I like him vastly, but the hurt will not last. Do not let us talk of him—let us talk of Mr. Longworth. How long he is in making up his mind!"

Reine sighs.

"It is all a muddle. Things are getting into a dreadful tangle, and I do not see daylight. Marie, I have had but one, but one letter from Léonce."

"Which goes to prove that M. Léonce is probably amusing himself well wherever he is, and does not trouble himself too much about you. But do not be anxious on that score. Next English mail will doubtless bring you another."

"Marie, if M. Longworth asks you, how shall you say no?"

Marie looks at her, a smile in her soft, yellow-hazel eyes.

"Chère Petite, I shall wait until he does ask me. There are times when I am not at all sure that he will ever give me that trouble. There are times when—— Come in!"

"Mrs. Windsor, miss," says Catherine, putting in her head. "is asking for you, miss. Mrs. Sheldon and Mr. Dexter have come, and missis's compliments, miss, and will you come down?"

"Hurry, Reine," Marie says, and goes.

But Reine does not hurry. She completes her toilet very leisurely, and then sits down by the open window. On the table before her lies a French prayer-book; in the prayer-book are some pictures. She takes out one, cherished with care, evidently. It is the photograph dropped on the grass several weeks ago, and picked up by Mr. Longworth. Long and tenderly she gazes at the pictured face.

"My dear one! my dear one!" she murmurs. "Oh! my Léonce, if the worse comes to the worst, how will it be with you?"

Another tap at the door. She replaces the picture hurriedly, rises, and opens. It is Catherine again.

"Miss Marie sent me, Miss Reine. She says they want you, and will you please come down at once?"

Reine goes. Sunset has faded out in primrose, and opal, and pearly gray; the stars are out, and the silvery summer moon is slowly rising. Some dozen are there, busily engaged in croquet, and Frank Dexter is by Marie's side. Mr. Longworth is there, but he is not so completely engrossed by the game as to be unable to observe how well pale corn-color becomes young ladies with clear, dark complexions and "exquisite brown, blessed eyes," and how very perfect is the effect of one large, sweet-smelling, crimson rose just over the left ear.

Reine joins the croquet party, and plays one or two games, but she is absent and distrait, plays at random, and exasperates her side to madness. At the end of the second, she throws down her mallet and declares she will spoil sport no longer. She disappears, and the game and the laughter go on without her. But presently they tire of balls and hoops, and music and quadrille on the grass is proposed.

"Where is Reine? She will play," suggests Grandmamma Windsor.

Madam does not think her younger granddaughter especially ornamental, and so decides she should on all occasions make herself particularly useful.

"She went in that direction. I will go and find her," says Mr. Longworth.

He goes, at once, and pending her discovery the party pair off, and stroll about in the moonlight. That luminary has quite arisen by this time, and although it is ten o'clock, the night is almost midday-clear. Evidently Mr. Longworth has watched Mlle. Reine, for he goes directly to where she is sitting. A low wall at the extreme end of Mrs. Windsor's back garden, or orchard, separates it from the shelving shore, and on this low wall Reine is sitting. The bay, all smooth and polished as a great mirror, lies before her; boats come and go; one merry party afar off have a concertina, and the music comes sweetly and faintly on the still night. The moon shines full on Reine's face, on the pale amber dress, the black ribbon around her waist, and the coral ornaments she wears. She is always picturesque, she is more picturesque than ever to-night.

She looks up as the footsteps approach, and he sees no shadow of change in her face as he draws near. She does not look surprised, she does not look annoyed, she does not look curious; she glances up at him with nothing in the steadfast brown eyes that Longworth can make out but serene indifference. He comes quite near, and leans against the wall.

"They are going to dance, Mlle. Reine," he says; "they want you to play."

"Do they?" she says, making no motion to rise. "There are others who can play, I believe. Who sent?"

"Mrs. Windsor."

"Ah!" a slight smile curls Reine's lip—she looks at him this time with a glance almost of contempt. "Monsieur," she says, "did she send *you*?"

"No, mademoiselle, I volunteered. I wanted to speak to you privately just a moment. I have wanted to for some time, but you do not give me an opportunity—that is why I have followed you. I wish to ask you, Mademoiselle Reine, if you will do me the honor to be my wife?"

CHAPTER XVI.

"THE WOOING O'T."

THE words are spoken. He stands looking at her quite calmly, but rather pale, and, beyond all shadow of doubt, in profound earnest. He has startled even Mlle. Reine out of her admirable nonchalance. She looks up at him—stunned.

"Monsieur!" she faintly exclaims.

"I am afraid I have been abrupt," he says, still quietly, yet with a certain depth of feeling in his voice; "I fear I have surprised you. And yet I thought——"

The color that has left it rushes back into her face, flushing it for a moment from forehead to chin.

"Oh, do not stop!" she cries out; "go on! Say what you thought, what you know, that my grandmother has asked you to marry one of us, that she has ordered us to marry you, whenever you did us the honor to ask! And I am the one! Oh! *Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!*"

She covers her face with her hands—a sudden, passionate, despairing gesture there is no mistaking. In the moonlight Longworth, already pale, turns perfectly white.

"Mademoiselle——," he begins, hurriedly.

"Oh! wait," she says, in a stifled voice, "only one moment. I am not going to say no, you know I am not going

to say no. And I ought to have been prepared. Wait only one moment, I entreat."

He waits. Were ever moments as long as hours before? Then her hands fall, and clasp hard together in her lap, and she looks at him with dry and dreary eyes.

"Forgive me," she says; "I ought not, I know. Since it had to be one of us, I ought to be glad it is I. I feared you would have chosen her—she is beautiful and I am not. Monsieur, I wonder you chose me!"

He stands petrified. Did ever maiden make such a speech to her lover before! But he manages to reply.

"Beauty is a question of taste. You have always been beautiful to me. But, mademoiselle, you misunderstand me, I think. When I said I hoped this would not surprise you, I meant that my attentions to you should have prepared you for it. I really thought they had; I really strove to make them. I never had any thought of asking Mlle. Marie from first to last."

She sits, her hands still clasped, but her eyes have left his face, and are watching the moonlight on the water. She seems to be listening as much to the faint, far-off music in the boat as to him.

"I knew," he goes on, "that you were prejudiced against me. I overheard, as you are aware, your declaration of war that afternoon last May in Miss Hariott's garden. But perhaps that very prejudice, that very defiance, were but added incentives—if I needed incentives. I strove in good faith, and after my light, to remove your aversion. How useless my striving, how poor my light, I realize to-night, realizing for the first time that you absolutely hate me."

"Monsieur!" she flashes out, with a touch of scorn, "did you think I loved you?"

"I never did you that injustice, mademoiselle. But I was not conscious in any way, or by any act of mine, of deserving your dislike, and I meant to try and remove it. Of late you

have seemed at least to be friendly with me—to treat me with no marked aversion, or avoidance; and I thought I had succeeded. I was presumptuous enough to hope that when I spoke you would neither be shocked nor amazed." She does not speak. She sits quite still on the low gray wall, and listens to the beat of the tiny waves on the shore.

"That Mrs. Windsor spoke to me is true," he goes on; "that I told her to speak to you and your sister is also true. But long before that I had thought of what I am saying to-night, and I would not have you kept ignorant of our compact. I thought it might pave the way. That I should like to please her is true once more, but that simply to please her, or to win her fortune I am speaking to-night, is utterly untrue, is utterly impossible. Not the wealth of the world, if that were all, could tempt me to say to any woman, what I am saying now to you.

"If that were all," she slowly repeats, and looks from the water into his face. "What else can there be?"

"Ah! what indeed!" He turns from her, and leans his folded arms upon the wall, with a curiously intense look in his blonde, handsome face. "If you do not know what else, Mademoiselle Reine, it would be wasted labor for me to tell you. But this I do tell you—you shall certainly not accept me, hating me!"

"I do not hate you."

"No? Then what is it? For you assuredly do not like me. The look your face wore when I first spoke I shall not speedily forget."

"Listen, Monsieur Longworth," says Reine, in a softened voice, "and forgive me if I pain you. When I came here first, and heard from Madame Windsor that we owed our coming to you—all to you, her bounty, her home, everything—I did hate you. It was wrong, I know, unjust I know, but all the same I detested you. I am not very good; I am proud, and quick-tempered, and self-willed. Oh, I know

it well, but I strove with the feeling, and it wore away. Then came that other day when grandmamma told us of your compact. How we were to stand off and wait for you to choose between us, and accept you humbly when you asked, or refuse and go out to beggary. Oh! it was hard, it was shameful, and all the old hate came back, and I think I would have killed you almost, if I could. I am a very passionate and wicked girl, I tell you again."

"Poor child!" he says, half to himself; "I don't blame you. It was natural."

"But this also wore away—in part," Reine continues, a tremor in her voice as she hears that half spoken murmur, "I could not altogether despise you, try as I would. You are a good and generous man—oh! let me say—and who can fail to respect goodness. And I made up my mind that if you asked me I would try and make the best of it and say yes quietly. I am not a brave girl, monsieur; I have always been cared for and cherished, and the thought of being turned on the world alone and poor, was terrible. There was Marie, too, I had to think of her. So I made up my mind to say yes if you spoke, and offend you no more. But when you came—and sitting here alone I was thinking of France—oh, my France!"—she stretches out her arms, a heart sob in every word—"and it all took me so by surprise that I was shocked, and you saw it. But that is over now, and I have shown you my heart as the good God sees it. And if you go to madame, my grandmother, and tell her you cannot take me, it will only serve me right."

The impassioned voice ceases, and the silence that follows is long. Mr. Longworth breaks it at last.

"It is for the home and the fortune you consent to marry me then? Only this?"

"Only this. What else could there be?"

Again silence. Again Mr. Longworth speaks in a curiously constrained voice.

"You do not absolutely dislike me, you say? You are sure of that?"

"I am quite sure. If I owed you less I might like you more."

"You mean if I had not refused to rob you and your sister of your birthright, if I had not pleaded with your grandmother to do you a simple act of justice, if I had not closed at once with her wish that I should marry you, closing with my own at the same time, you mean that you might even like me?"

"Yes, monsieur," she says frankly, and at the absurdity of it she half smiles, "I mean that. For it would not be so hard to—to like you, I think."

"Well," he says, "these are my crimes. I stand arraigned and must plead guilty. I must also, as you do not absolutely dislike me, peril your good opinion still further by persisting in wishing to marry you. It sounds like a paradox somehow," he says, a smile breaking up the gravity of his face. "You are quite certain, mademoiselle, you do not wish me to give you up? I will do it if you say so."

"Indeed I do not!" she answers, with almost startling candor. "I should be very sorry if you did."

"I would not marry an unwilling wife," says Mr. Longworth steadily. "We are situated so oddly, I hardly know what to do—you unwilling, yet willing. Perhaps when the time comes, you may give yourself to me of your own free will. And until you can, our wedding-day must be put off."

"Our wedding-day!" She thrills and shrinks under his look, under the solemn meaning of these words.

"We stand plighted now," and as he says it he takes her hand, "and I will wait with what patience I may. If the day ever arrives when you can put both your hands in mine, like this, and say, 'Laurence, I love you, and can never let you go!' then I will thank Heaven for my happiness, and claim you. If it never comes—if, as time goes on, your dis

trust of me goes on, too, then be sure I will know it, and be the first to break the bond we are binding now."

He releases the hands he holds, and Reine feels, with a sort of wonder at herself, that her eyes are looking at him admiringly, as he stands, brave, fair, noble, earnest, true, before her.

"Shall we go back?" he says, changing his tone, and looking at his watch. "They will think me a woefully tardy messenger."

She descends from the wall, and takes the arm he offers, her face drooping, her fearless frankness gone, silent, shy.

"One last word," he says. "Reine—I may call you Reine, free from prefix? It is the prettiest name in the world."

"Surely," she answers, readily.

"It would be asking too much, I suppose, to ask you to call me Laurence?"

She smiles and shakes her head.

"I am afraid so. And yet it is an easy name to say."

"We will wait. I think all will come in time. May I tell Mrs. Windsor?"

"Oh! yes, yes—the sooner the better. Let all be open—let all be told. I hate—yes, I abhor secrets!"

Some of the old passion rings in her voice. He looks at her in surprise—what can this outspoken child know of secrets? For she looks a very child to him in her impetuous fits of wrath, although at other times the stately Little Queen they call her.

"Then I will tell her to-morrow," he answers. And so suspense is over, and Reine Landelle is wooed and won.

CHAPTER XVII.

"THE VERY BEST THING IN ALL THE WORLD."



HE croquet players are all together, laughing and talking in the moonlight, when Longworth rejoins them. Reine has slipped in through an open window, and as he appears the first notes of the lancers break on their ears.

"Really, Laurence," says Mrs. Sheldon, looking at him with searching eyes, "how very long it has taken you. Were you obliged to go to Miss Hariott's to find Mlle. Reine?"

"Not quite so far." Will you dance with me, Totty? I see they are forming the set."

All the rest of the evening Reine remains at the piano. When the lamps are lighted and they flock in, tired and breathless with the sheer hard work of dancing on the grass, she still retains the piano-stool, and begins to sing unasked.

Even Mrs. Sheldon, who dislikes her and is instinctively jealous of her—who thinks her small, and plain, and unattractive—is forced to own that a plain woman with a divine voice may be a formidable rival. And Longworth, leaning against the chimney-piece, sipping his iced lemonade and talking to Marie, is listening to the sister who sings far more than to the sister who talks—that she can see.

Once only does he and Reine exchange a word again that evening. He knows she keeps her piano post to avoid him, and he does not approach her. The party breaks up early, and he is the last of all to draw near and wish her good-night. There is a certain wistfulness in his eyes, but here

are fixed upon the keys, and she does not observe it. She is striking chords at random as he speaks.

"Good-night, petite Reine," he says, with a smile, "Shall you be at home to-morrow evening when I call?"

"I do not know, Monsieur Longworth," she says with sudden hurry; "there is just one thing I wish to say. It is this: When you speak to grandmamma, make her understand she must change her will—that all must not go to you—that Marie must have half. It is her right, you know," she says, and looks for the first time up at him, a flash in her eyes.

"Oh! confound the money!" Longworth thinks, with inward savagery. "Before Heaven, I wish Mrs. Windsor were a beggar. Even this child can think of nothing else."

"Grandmamma will listen to you," pursues mademoiselle, "I think you will find her disappointed in your choice, monsieur. I am quite sure—and very naturally—she thinks you must ask Marie."

"Mademoiselle," he says, "I am curious about some thing. Down yonder in the garden you said this: 'Since it had to be one of us, I am glad it is I.' Now, everything considered, it strikes me that was rather a curious speech."

"A bold one perhaps, monsieur thinks?"

"Well—no, since there is but one way of interpreting it. Your great love for your sister makes self-abnegation easy. You prefer to sacrifice yourself—since one of you it must be—than see her sacrificed."

"If that explanation satisfies monsieur, it will do as well as any other," responds mademoiselle, coolly, "but it is not precisely what I meant. Do not ask me now—one day I promise to tell you."

"I wonder when that day will come," he says, leaning against the piano, and looking down at her, wondering how any one can think that spirited mignonne face plain; "mean-
time I am ready to wait—for everything. Only I should like to convince you that if Mrs. Windsor had not a penny,

if she hated me, and would cast you off for accepting me, I would still have spoken—ay, and said far more than I have said to you to-night. I wonder if I could."

Reine looks up at him, the old distrust and doubt, almost aversion in her gaze.

"Mr. Longworth," she says, frigidly, "I have accepted you. I am ready to marry you; I do not dislike you, and I own you an honorable gentleman. Is anything more necessary? Believe me I do not expect fine speeches from you. I would much rather not have them. They force me to doubt your sincerity—and I would rather think you sincere."

"You certainly understand plain speaking," he says, drawing a hard breath, but half laughing. "Suppose—only for curiosity's sake—suppose I told you I was in love with you? Would you believe that?"

"Most certainly not, monsieur."

"And why? A man might fall in love with you, might he not, Mlle. Reine?"

"I do not know why we are talking nonsense," replies Mlle. Reine, looking at him with brightly angry eyes. "You often do, I know; but this is hardly a time or theme for jest. We will leave love out of the question, if you please, once and for all. You will speak to Madame Windsor when and how you choose, but these are the terms upon which I accept you—that half her fortune goes to Marie."

"Good-night, Mlle. Reine," he says, brusquely, and bows and turns to go. But she lays one hand on his sleeve, and smiles in his face.

"Now, I have made you angry, and all because I would not talk sentimental nonsense. Americans always shake hands when they say good-night, do they not? Indeed you are always shaking hands, I think. Let us shake hands, Monsieur Laurence."

He laughs and obeys, and she goes with him to the door.

still smiling radiantly. Is she developing coquetry, too? he wonders.

"The sort of girl to make a fool of any man," he thinks, half grimly, recalling the brilliant eyes and smile; "piquant, provoking, half bewitching, wholly exasperating; having more than any other I ever met that

* Caressing and exquisite grace, never bold,
Ever present, which just a few women possess.

The day shall come—that I swear—when she will not only forgive me for bringing her here, and refusing to rob her, but also for asking her to be my wife!"

Mr. Longworth goes on with his usual routine of office work next day, and it is after dinner before he turns his steps toward the gray Stone House. He finds Mrs. Windsor sitting alone, in her favorite room, in her favorite chair, her white hands folded in her black-silk lap, her eyes fixed on the gray summer evening outside. No voice in high, sweet singing greets him as he draws near, and he feels a curious sense of blankness and disappointment in the fact.

Mrs. Windsor welcomes her friend, and informs him she is suffering from slight headache, and wonders why he has come to see her this evening.

"Why not this evening?" the gentleman inquires. "Where are the young ladies?"

"Where I imagined you to be, at the concert. Frank Dexter came here for Marie half an hour ago."

"Oh! to be sure! the concert. I had forgotten all about it. And I fully intended to ask Reine. By the way, with whom has she gone?"

"Her bosom friend, Miss Hariott, I believe."

Longworth's brow clears. Mrs. Windsor's eyes are fixed piercingly upon him.

"You meant to ask Reine?" she repeats, slowly. "Do I apprehend you correctly? Reine?"

"Reine. Congratulate me, my dear madam, and consent to receive me into your family. Last night I proposed, and was accepted."

"Proposed!" she echoes, in a bewildered way; "last night! Not to—surely not to——"

"Reine. Of course to Reine. It appears to me I concealed my intentions well, or every one has been singularly blind. When we talked together that night, coming from the picnic, I meant to offer myself to your younger granddaughter if to either. And I am happy to tell you she has said yes."

"Laurence," Mrs. Windsor says, in slow wonder, "do you mean to tell me you are in love with her?"

"Madam, excuse me. That is a question your granddaughter herself never put. When I answer it, it must be to her first of all. Will it not suffice that I have asked her to marry me, and she has answered yes?"

"I feel bewildered," Mrs. Windsor says, and she looks it. "Reine, when you might have had Marie. A small, plain, rather sullen-tempered girl, without attractiveness of any sort except good taste in dress and a fine voice, when you might have had rare beauty, grace, and sweetness. This explains why you permitted Frank Dexter to run about with her everywhere. And you really prefer Reine?"

"I really do," he says, almost laughing, "amazing as it appears to be."

"Amazing indeed, to me. Of course, you must prefer her, or you would not ask her. But, Laurence, the girl does not even like you."

"That is my great misfortune. It shall be the labor of my life to try and induce her to change her mind. I do not despair of success in time."

"Well, talk of the perversity of women after this! And when is it to be?"

"What?"

"The wedding, of course."

"Somewhere in the dim and shadowy future. When Mlle. Reine does me the honor to overcome her aversion and—well, let us say, begins to tolerate me. Not an hour before—that is the express stipulation. I have your consent and approval, madam, I presume?"

"Undoubtedly, but I wish it had been Marie. Reine! I cannot realize it. I never thought of her as your wife. I am confounded."

"No doubt. One's choice invariably confounds one's friends. But I have chosen, and am not likely to change my mind. If I can win Mlle. Reine's good opinion after a little, believe me I shall consider myself a most fortunate man."

"I think you must be in love with her," says Mrs. Windsor, thoughtfully, and a conscious smile comes into Longworth's face. "What shall I say to her when she returns? For I am sure I do not know."

"What you would say to Marie in her place. And, madam," he says, hurriedly, "I wish you would try to like her. Believe me, it is a heart of gold. A little kindness from you will go a great way, and she needs kindness, poor child."

"Have I been unkind to her?" Mrs. Windsor says, in proud surprise; "has she been complaining?"

"You know that she has not. And while we are on this subject, pardon my asking if you have destroyed that will, of which you spoke to me before they came?"

"I have not," she returns, in the same cold voice.

"Then I beg you to do it. Make another, and give Marie her fair share. Or make none, and let the law divide. It is presumptuous in me to speak to you of this, but I think you will not misunderstand my motive."

"I am not likely to. You have proved yourself abundantly disinterested. I will think of what you say; no doubt."

the world will hold it only justice. Are you going, Laurence?"

"I must present myself at the concert for an hour at least. Thank you, Mrs. Windsor." He takes her hand as she rises. "How often I seem to have to thank you, but never, I think, with quite the same depth of gratitude as to-night."

"You owe me nothing here," she returns with far less cordiality than usual. "I never thought of this. But you have chosen for yourself. I can only hope you will never repent it."

"That I am sure I shall not—let it end as it may. Good-night."

"How sweet are the congratulations of friends!" thinks Longworth, with a shrug, as he shuts the door. "And this is but the beginning of the end! If I had fallen in love with Marie's doll face and doll's soul, all would have been proper and well; but I choose a 'queen of noble nature's crowning,' and because her complexion is dark, and that piquant little face irregular, and she is only five feet four in her very highest-heeled shoes, every one will fall into a trance of wonder. As if goodness and greatness were measured by the yard, or diamonds sold by the hundred weight!"

Mr. Longworth puts in an appearance at the concert, and does escort duty after, for Miss Hester Hariott and Mlle. Reine Landelle. Need it be said that Frank Dexter hangs devotedly over Marie? He has not put his fate to the touch yet, Longworth sees; his case is so desperate, the stake is so immense, that he turns coward and dare not be premature. All things are possible to the man who can wait, and Frank, who never practiced patience before, is testing that virtue now to its fullest.

"Has Reine told you?" Longworth asks, as he stands leaning over Hester Hariott's little white gate. They have

left Reine home, and he has sauntered back with the elder lady to the cottage.

"Reine has told me nothing," she replies, quickly. "Larry, what have you been about?"

"A piece of folly, I dare say, if the truth were known. Asking your Little Queen to marry me."

She stands silent. She loves Reine. She tells herself she has wished for this; but Longworth is her friend, and when a friend marries, his friendship must end. And with all her love for Reine, it is a moment before Hester Hariott can speak.

"And so I lose my friend! Well, I am glad." She draws a long breath, and holds out her hand. "Yes, Laurence," she says resolutely, "I am glad. You win a treasure in winning Reine Landelle."

"Ah! but I haven't won her—at least not yet. I have only asked her to marry me—quite another thing, you understand. Hester, you are her chosen friend, you know her well—tell me if I have any hope."

"I will not tell you one word. Find out for yourself. I am not afraid of your man's vanity ever letting you despair. Little silent witch! To think how confidential we were here all the afternoon, talking of you too, and that she should never breathe a word!"

"What were you saying of me?"

"Nothing you will ever hear. What does Grandmother say?"

"Many things, the principal being she would rather it were Marie, and that she gives consent."

"Marie!" repeats Miss Hariott. "Do you know. Laurence, I do not quite comprehend Mlle. Marie. She seems all right enough, and Reine adores her. She is gentle, and smiling, and too serene-tempered by half for my taste; but I cannot see through her. I don't know what underlies it all. Now, Reine is transparent as crystal. Still I wonder Marie was not the one you chose."

"Of course you do! I have made up my mind to hear that from every one I know. Perhaps being expected to choose one, the natural contrariety of man, made me select the other. There goes eleven; I won't keep you here all night. Good-by. I have your good wishes, I suppose?"

"My very best wishes. Good-night."

She stands until he has disappeared, until the last ring of his footsteps dies away, then she turns with a sigh.

"And so it ends! Well, it was pleasant while it lasted, and nothing lasts forever; life's pleasant things least of all.

"Nothing can be as it has been before,
Better so call it, only not the same—"

better, no doubt, and since it had to be I, am glad it is Reine. Pretty little dark-eyed Queen!—she ought to be happy as Longworth's wife."

Matrimonial news flies apace—not even misfortune flies faster. Before the end of two days all Baymouth knows that Mr. Longworth of the *Phoenix* and Miss Reine Landelle are engaged. And every one is astonished.

"Reine!" cries the *vox populi*. "My dear, are you sure? Reine is the younger, you know, and not at all pretty—slight, and dark, and rather thin. It must certainly be the other."

But it is not the other, and "still it spreads, and still the wonder grew."

"To choose the younger when he might have had the other! By Jove!" cries the male *vox populi*, "Longworth always was an odd fish—no other fellow would do it. Still she's a nice little thing, with a magnificent pair of eyes, and a stunning voice. What a pot of money he'll get with her—lucky dog, that Longworth. Some men always fall on their feet like cats; he's one. Lost one fortune for love, and now wins another—cured by a hair of the dog that bit

him. I suppose he's in love with her, though, 'gad, I never saw any sign of it."

It spread far and near. Ladies call at the Stone House, and speak delicately to Mrs. Windsor, and hear rumor confirmed in headquarters. Reine is the chosen one, no doubt of that. They look at the sisters, curiously, as if beholding them for the first time; both are eminently cool, serene, and self-collected. Marie's faint, sweet laugh is sweet and ready as ever, Reine's dark eyes are steady and unembarrassed. No jealousy exists between them, that is evident—they understand each other perfectly; all may see that.

The news flies to Mrs. Longworth in its very first flight, and circulates among the boarders. Frank's eyes flash with delight, he wrings his cousin's hand with a grip that makes its owner wince, and congratulates him with a sincerity there can be no mistaking. Congratulations rain upon him, indeed, and last of all comes Mrs. Sheldon extending her white hand, and rather shifting away from the gaze of his blue piercing eyes.

"Your choice has surprised us," she says; "we all expected it would be Marie. But naturally your taste has changed, and, as a blonde man, you prefer brunettes. She will be very rich, and I am sure it is a most desirable match."

"Thanks, Totty," responds Mr. Longworth. "As you say, it is a most desirable match, and even you must consider Mlle. Reine's prospective riches as the very least of all her attractions."

He leaves her somewhat abruptly, and goes out on the stoop, where his sub-editor sits smoking an after-dinner pipe, and looking unusually grave. Contrary to custom, O'Sullivan has not been the first to wish him joy—has not wished him joy at all, in fact. Longworth approaches, and slaps him on the shoulder.

"*Salve*, O'Sullivan!—son of a hundred kings—*monturi te*

salutant! When all are offering good wishes, why sit you here silent and glum, the death's head at the banquet? It's not like you, O. Come, man, speak up!"

"Among so many," says Mr. O'Sullivan, dryly, "you can scarcely dispense with mine. But I wish ye luck, chief—I do, indeed. She's a jewel, and you're a trump, and upon me life I'm glad you've got her. But faith I thought it was to be the other."

Longworth groans.

"And thou Brutus! Go to! If that has been said to me once, it has been one thousand times in the last two days. Upon my word, it is growing too much, and I'll have to brain the very next who says it."

He takes his way to Miss Hariott's, where the sisters and Frank Dexter are also due. There has been a very sentimental and feminine interview between Miss Hariott and Mlle. Reine, in which the younger maiden has flung herself into the elder maiden's arms in a sudden outburst very unusual with her, and during which the elder has shed some tears, also very unusual with her. A number of kisses have been exchanged, sundry good wishes given and received, but after all very little has been said, and Mlle. Reine holds her virgin heart and all that it contains well in her own keeping. Some day Longworth may see it, but Miss Hariott opines despondently that day is still afar off.

They sit out under the trees as usual, and drink tea out of Miss Hariott's china cups, while the gray of the evening wears apace. Frank is close to his liege lady's side; Miss Hariott and Longworth talk "shop," literature, and journalism; and Reine, by herself, peruses a new novel. Frank watches the newly-betrothed with quizzical eyes, directs Marie's attention, and finally speaks.

"Well, for a pair of blissful and freshly-engaged lovers, commend me to Longworth and Mlle. Reine. With what calmness they meet, with what composure they part; the

manners of both have all the lofty repose that marks the caste of Vere de Vere. Such a word as spooning is unknown in their vocabulary. I wonder how Longworth proposed. I wish I had been near; I require a lesson, and it must have been richness to hear him."

"You require no lesson in easy and natural impertinence at least, young man," says Miss Hariott, with severity; "the impudence of the rising generation is beyond belief."

Marie laughs. Reine goes on with her novel. Longworth looks imperturbable.

"There is a Spanish proverb," continues Mr. Dexter, unabashed, "which says, 'To be wise and love exceeds man's strength.' Look in Larry's face, owl-like in its impassive wisdom, and credit it who can. But then, there are people who do not believe in love. Mlle. Reine, do you?"

"Yes," says Reine, and reads on.

"No hope there," pursues Frank. "Longworth, do you?"

"Did I ever say I did not?"

"Actions speak louder than words. Some men only talk misogyny, others act it."

"And I do neither. You may have my *credo*, Baby, if you like. I believe in love; I believe it to be the only thing in Eden which the sin of Adam did not destroy. And I do not speak of the love of father, brother, friend; but of that other which has been in the world since the world first began, and Adam looked on Eve and found her fair; which gray beards and wise heads ignore or pass with a sneer, because their own day has gone and left them bankrupt—the love which binds two human hearts and which fire cannot burn out, nor many waters drown, nor leagues of land sever, nor sickness change, nor death end; which will go on the same for all time—always old, ever new, the strongest passion earth holds—mightier than hate, or avarice, or fame, or

glory, or ambition—which all the cynics that ever railed can neither alter, nor banish, nor ignore."

Frank lifts himself on his elbow and gazes in a sort of stupefaction at the speaker.

"Powers of earth and air!" he exclaims, "what have I said to evoke such a torrent of language? Is this an extract from one of last winter's lectures, Longworth, or is it a *Phenix* leader for to-morrow's issue?"

"You asked my opinion and you have it, my Baby."

"Have you been listening, Mlle. Reine?" goes on Frank.

"Yes, I see you have. What do you think of this eloquent and unprovoked outburst? Are those your sentiments, too?"

"I indorse every word," responds Reine, with ineffable calm. "Love is the very best thing in all the world."

"Two souls with but a single thought,' etc. Well, Larry, all I have to say is, that for a man of enthusiastic sentiments, your practice is phlegmatic and cold-blooded to a degree. When I am engaged——"

He pauses, flushes, and looks up at the clear, star-like face above him.

"Continue, Baby. The artless views of youth are ever fresh and entertaining. When you are engaged——"

"When I am engaged I shall not model myself upon your present performance of the rôle. I say no more. If Mlle. Reine approves, all is well."

"Mlle. Reine approves. 'The king can do no wrong.'" She throws down her book and rises. "I feel musically inclined; if I do not disturb any one's *file-à-fête*, I shall go in."

"Go in, by all means," answers Mr. Dexter. "I always talk best when my remarks are set to music. Sing '*Robert, que toi j'aime*'—you can do it better than the coffee-colored *prima-donna* of the concert last week."

"How progresses the yacht, Frank?" inquires Long-

worth; "it appears to me we do not hear as much of it as we used."

"The yacht will be launched in a fortnight. She is a dazzling beauty, and the admiration of all beholders."

"What do you mean to call her?"

Frank slightly reddens.

"The 'Marie,'" he answers. "Miss Landelle does her the honor to allow me the name, and even promises to perform the christening. Miss Hariott, I am going to take you and Larry and the Misses Landelle for a week's cruise along the coast of Maine. I have often heard you say you would like to visit the Isle of Shoals."

"The 'Marie'—a pretty name, Frank," says Miss Hariott, and glances at Marie herself. That fair face is placid, is expressionless almost; it betrays nothing. But, to the surprise of all, Reine speaks through the open window, and speaks sharply.

"Nonsense, Monsieur Frank! You must not; Marie, tell him he must not. Yours is not a pretty name for a ship."

"It isn't a ship," says Frank, lazily: "schooner, clipper-built, two hundred tons register, master, Bill Sanders. Couldn't have a prettier name than the 'Marie.' Nothing prettier on earth."

"Besides," continues Reine, "it is not fair. I heard you tell Miss Hariott, ever so long ago, on board the Hesperia, you meant to call it after her. You must not break your word. Call it the Hester."

"Don't cotton to Hester—never did, no disrespect to Miss Hariott meant. The 'Hester,' as a name for a yacht, is flat, stale, and unprofitable."

"Call it the 'Little Queen!'" suggests Miss Hariott. "You can find no fault with that on the score of prettiness."

"The 'Marie' I have said, the 'Marie' I maintain Miss

Landelle come to my aid, let me not be overpowered by numbers. You have promised, and I hold you to your word."

"Marie!" Reine exclaims. There is a world of entreaty, of pain, of pleading, in her voice, far more than the occasion would seem to warrant.

Marie turns round, and looks her sister for a moment full in the face; then she speaks.

"Petite," she says, "I have promised, and a promise given, with me, is always a promise kept. It is but a trifle, after all. If Mr. Frank prefers the name—though as Miss Hariott says, 'Little Queen' would be better—it shall be as he wishes.

"And I wish for Marie, always for Marie," says Frank in a low voice, full of impassioned meaning. He takes her hand in his for a second, and kisses it quickly. "Thank you," he says, "a thousand times."

"We are waiting for your song, Little Queen," calls Miss Hariott, but Reine does not sing. She plays, however, the "Moonlight Sonata," and when the evening is over and they go home, Longworth sees a cloud on her face all the way. What is it? he wonders; why does she object to the yacht being named after her sister? As Marie herself has said, it is but a trifle after all.

Toward the end of July there is held, in Baymouth, Baymouth's yearly exhibition. They hold it just outside the town, and mammoth specimens of the vegetable and bovine kingdoms are displayed for the delight and instruction of all beholders. In connection with it, there is also a flower show, likewise sundry bewildering specimens of feminine handicraft, in the shape of Chinese puzzle bed-quilts, rag-carpets, and Berlin wool work. Everybody goes, old and young, fashionable and unfashionable, and as the afternoon wears on Mr. Longworth and Mlle. Reine Landelle find

themselves sauntering under a blazing sun, examining rather listlessly the huge pumpkins and apples, looking apoplectic and ready to burst with sheer fatness, the monstrous pigs and sheep, the gaudy patchwork, and flaming rag carpets.

"They are fearfully and wonderfully made," quoth Mr. Longworth; "and the thought, that naturally strikes an unimpassioned observer is, how little the people must have to do who make them. But it is broilingly hot—suppose we go and take one look at the flowers and then drive home?"

Reine assents. It is uncomfortably warm, and the long, cool, homeward ride will be pleasant. For it has come to this—she can look forward to a two hours *tête-à-tête* drive with her affianced without the slightest repulsion. There have been times, of late, when, without the faintest tinge of coxcombry, Longworth fancies eyes and smile light up, and welcome him, when she has strolled by his side whither he chose to lead, seemingly well content to be there. To-day they have been together for hours, and she has not shown, does not show now, the slightest weariness of his presence; and as he looks at her, he thinks that perhaps that wedding-day need not be put off so indefinitely after all.

They go to look at the flowers. Roses predominate, and perfume all the air. The band plays, and here the gilded youth and loveliness of Baymouth most do congregate. It is certainly the best of the show, to all save the practical agricultural mind, that revels in fat pigs and bloated cabbages.

"Look here, Reine," says Mr. Longworth, "at this Gloire de Dijon. Isn't he a splendid fellow—'queen rose of the rosebud garden of——' No, by the by, that's a mixing up of genders——"

He stops short and looks at her. Her gloved hand has been resting lightly on his arm; he feels it suddenly clench and tighten. Her eyes are fixed, the color has left her face, her lips are breathless and apart. Terror, amaze, anger, are in her eyes, and with them, and contradicting them, swift,

inexpressible gladness. He looks where she looks, and sees a stranger approaching—a young man, faultless of attire, and faultlessly good-looking. It is a face he has seen before—where, he cannot at that instant tell. But he recalls directly, for Reine speaks, in a whisper, still with tense grasp on his arm.

"Oh!" she breathes; "it is—it is—Léonce!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

M. LÉONCE DURAND.

SHE disengages her hand, and makes a step forward, her lips parted, her eyes dilating, in the intensity of some great surprise. And still through the incredulity, mixed with utter amaze, Longworth can see welcome, and gladness, and fear. A keen, hot, swift pang—is it jealousy?—stings through him, as he looks at the object of this sudden white change in his betrothed's face. The stranger is by her side. "Reine, ma petite, Reine, ma belle!" he hears him say, as he clasps both her hands, and stooping-kisses her on both cheeks. An angry, haughty flush mounts to Longworth's forehead, a frown contracts his eyebrows.

"Léonce! Léonce!" he hears Reine say, half under her breath, in a terrified sort of whisper, "Léonce, why have you come?"

"Need you ask?" he says, reproachfully. "Because I could not stay away. No need to remind me of my promise—I have broken it with my eyes open. And there is nothing to fear. I intend to be discretion itself. Where is Marie?"

They speak in French, and rapidly, in hurried undertones,

but this much Longworth hears. Reine seems to have forgotten him, her companion not to have observed him. Their conversation seems likely to be extremely interesting, more interesting perhaps than agreeable, but he feels no desire to play eavesdropper. The little he has heard has deepened the frown upon his face. Who is this fellow? What promise has he broken in coming here? Why is it necessary to be discretion itself? Why is there nothing to fear? They still stand, their hands clasped, talking in vehement lowered voices, Reine evidently much excited, indignant, anxious, expostulating; he cool, half smiling, resolutely making light of every entreaty. They can talk without fear of discovery, the spot is isolated, everybody is collected around the bank. Mr. Longworth can stand afar off, and gaze at the new-comer at his leisure. They are so engrossed with one another that he remains in the background unseen and forgotten.

The editor of the *Phoenix* is a cosmopolitan, a thorough man of the world, with no prejudice against any man's nationality, though that man were a Hottentot, or a Fiji Islander; but he experiences an invincible and utter repulsion to this young Frenchman at sight.

Nothing in the Frenchman's appearance certainly warrants the repulsion—he is without exception the handsomest man Longworth has ever seen. He is not tall, but his slight figure looks the perfection of manly strength, and a certain square shouldered, upright military air bespeaks one not unacquainted with soldiering. The colorless olive complexion, the jet black hair and mustache, the large, brown, melancholy eyes—eyes the most beautiful, competent female critics had ere this agreed, that ever were set in a male creature's head, hands and feet slender and shapely and fit for a prince, the polished and consummate courtesy of a Frenchman of the old noblesse—that was M. Léonce Durand, the man who stood with Reine Landelle's hands held close in

his, the man at whom Longworth stands and gazes, contempt, irritation, jealousy, all in his cold, sarcastic eyes.

"A sweetly pretty young man," he thinks, "of the stamp known to *extrême bread-and-butter-maidenhood* as 'interesting.' Interesting is the word, I think, for pallid young gentlemen, with a tendency to bile, long eyelashes, and dyed mustaches, white teeth, and an inch and a quarter of brain. The pity is, when Nature gives herself so much trouble embellishing the outside, she generally finishes her work in a hurry and leaves the inside a blank."

But this is Mr. Longworth's little mistake. Nature, in giving M. Durand more than his fair share of beauty, has by no means forgotten that useful article brains, and, to do the young man justice, he values the latter much more than the former. Vain he is not, never has been. His looking-glass and women's eyes have long ago made him so absolutely aware of his good looks, that he has ceased to think of them, and accepts the fact that he is handsome as he accepts the other facts that he can hear and see, without thinking about it. Many years ago, when he was a little soft-eyed angel in long, ebon ringlets and velvet blouse, it had been impressed upon his memory never to be effaced. Walking in the garden of the Tuileries, with Madame Durand, the loveliest and greatest lady in all France had stooped with a little exclamation of pleasure and kissed him, and asked him his name. Many years ago truly, and she who was then a radiant bride, peerless throughout the world for her own beauty, was now an exiled, widowed, and sorrowing woman; but Léonce Durand grew up with the memory of that caress in his heart, and it was still that memory, not so many months before, that had nerved his arm against the Prussian foe.

All at once, by a sudden effort, Reine Landelle, in the midst of her excited talk, recalls the fact that she is not alone. Longworth sees her companion glance at him with a slight

interrogative elevation of the eyebrows. Directly after both approach.

"Monsieur Longworth," begins Reine hurriedly, "allow me to present my friend, M. Durand."

M. Durand smiles, touches his hat, and bows with the inimitable ease and grace of his nation. Mr. Longworth lifts his almost an eighth of an inch, as stiffly, and coldly, and repellantly as mortal man can perform the act, and in profound silence.

"I have taken Mlle. Reine by surprise," says M. Durand, still smilingly, and in unexceptionable English. "I wrote, but I infer my letter has miscarried. Extraordinary, is it not, my coming upon you, Petite, the moment I enter the grounds?"

"How did you discover we were here?" Reine asks.

She is still looking pale and agitated, Longworth can see, paler and more agitated than any mere ordinary surprise can account for.

"From Madame Windsor's *femme de chambre*, I suspect," responds M. Durand coolly, and Reine looks up at him with a faint gasp.

"Léonce! you went *there*?"

"But certainly, ma Petite. Is there anything surprising in that? Where else should I go? A very fine old mansion, too; I congratulate you upon your new home. A thrice amiable lady's-maid appeared—informed me you were here, informed me also how I should find my way. I come, and almost the first person I behold is ma belle cousine. *Voilà tout.*"

"Ah! you are Mlle. Reine's cousin?" remarks Longworth, and unconsciously the contraction between the eyebrows slowly relaxes.

"Her cousin—more than cousin—more than brother—is it not so, Petite?" he says gayly. "Madame Durand, the great-aunt of Mlle. Reine, was my belle mère—my

mother-in-law. How is it you say that word, Mr. Longworth?"

"Your step-mother, perhaps."

"Ah! thanks, yes; that is it—my step-mother. I was a little fellow of eight when madame married my father, and Petite here; a fairy of two when she first came to live with us in the old house in Rouen. Is it to be wondered at, then, having lived together all our lives, I should be transported to meet her again after a separation of—*ma foi!*—six endless months?"

"Then, in point of fact, Mr. Durand," says Mr. Longworth, coldly, "you and Miss Landelle are not related at all?"

"By no tie of blood, monsieur," responds the gay Léonce, smiling down into Reine's half-averted face; "but there are ties nearer and dearer than even ties of blood. Petite, all this time I see not Marie. If monsieur will kindly pardon us——"

Again M. Durand finishes his sentence with a gracious and graceful bow, again Mr. Longworth responds by a curt and most ungracious nod.

"If you want to find your sister, Mlle. Reine," he says, ignoring the suave speaker, "I think you will find her in this direction. At what hour shall I come to take you home? You were expressing a desire to go home, you may remember, a moment before Monsieur Durand came up."

"In about an hour," Reine answers, taking Durand's arm and moving away.

Longworth bows, and turns in the opposite direction. He catches Durant's low, amused laugh, as he goes, although he does not catch his words.

"Pardieu! chère Petite; what have I done that monsieur, your friend, should scowl upon me so blackly? Is it that you have a lover, and he is jealous? I saw him looking pistols and small swords as I embraced you."

Miss Marie Landelle has left the circle surrounding the

band, and strolled away on the arm of one of her innumerable admirers, out of the heat and noise, and glare, and it chances that it is Longworth who comes upon her first. She is seated under a great elm, her hat off, her fair face slightly flushed with heat and weariness, all her blonde hair falling damp and glittering over her shoulders, slightly bored evidently, but beautiful as a dream. Longworth thinks it as he has thought it a hundred times before, and wonders how it is that admiring that perfect loveliness as he does, it yet has so little power to move him. Her cavalier of the moment is seated beside her, looking almost idiotically happy, and he darts a frowning look at the intruder. But Miss Landelle glances up with that supremely sweet, though somewhat monotonous smile of hers, and moves aside her white drapery to make room for him on the other side.

"Thanks, don't disturb yourself," he says. "Ah! Markham, how do? Didn't know you were here; horrible hot and stupid, isn't it? Unutterable bore all this sort of thing; but they will do it every summer, invariably selecting the dog days, and we persist in coming to see it."

"Where is Reine?" asks Reine's sister.

"Looking for you. She met a friend just now, a friend from France, and both have gone in search of you. I will take you to them, if you like."

"A friend?" repeats Miss Landelle; a puzzled look coming over the serene face. "A friend from France—here. But there is no one to come. Who can it be?"

"A very handsome man—M. Léonce Durand."

Marie Landelle's is a face that seldom changes, either in color or expression, but as he speaks Longworth sees a most remarkable change pass over it. The faint, incredulous smile fades, the slight flush dies slowly out, the lips compress, the pupils of the bronze eyes seem to contract—a look of quiet, intense anger sets every feature. There are no conflicting emotions of terror or gladness here, as in

Reine's case—Miss Landelle evidently has but one feeling on the subject. She rises at once.

"Excuse me, Mr. Markham," she turns to that bereaved gentleman with her usual grace, but without her usual smile. "Mr. Longworth, will you be kind enough to take me to my sister and her friend?"

"Her friend," thinks Longworth, as he presents his arm. "Is he not yours then as well? If he were your deadliest foe you could hardly wear a look that would welcome him less."

He has said, and he has thought many times, there is something about this young lady that baffles him. She reminds him of a mirror, clear and transparent on first view, reflecting everything, hiding nothing; but turn to the reverse side and you meet—blankness. Whatever depth there may be you get at nothing but the fair, shining, polished surface; all beneath is like the back of the mirror, impenetrable. There is a sort of still strength in her character, it seems to Longworth, that may be hidden from her closest friends for years, unless some sudden emergency calls it forth. Has that sudden emergency arrived? Has she any reason for being antagonistic with this man? That he is unlooked for and unwelcome to both is evident, but the difference, so far as Longworth's penetration and prejudice can make it out, is that Reine likes, perhaps loves him, while the elder sister simply and absolutely is his enemy.

They walk on in silence for a little. Then Marie speaks, and even her voice has a subtle change, and sounds as hard and cold as Mrs. Windsor's own.

"Reine introduced M. Durand to you, I suppose?" she inquires.

"She did."

"He is Reine's cousin, you know, her brother almost."

"Indeed? Mlle. Reine's great aunt was his stepmother. Does that constitute cousinship and brotherhood in France?"

She glances at him quickly, then laughs in a constrained way.

"All the same, they have been as brother and sister all their lives. Reine could not be fonder of him if he were her brother in reality."

"From the little I have seen, I infer not."

The responses are frigid—the expression of Mr. Longworth's face, chill and cynical. Evidently this sort of relationship, when the "brother" is so eminently handsome a man as M. Léonce Durand, is not altogether to his taste. There is another pause.

"Did Mr. Durand say how or why he comes?" she asks.

"Not in my hearing. I believe he stated that he could not stay away, that six endless months had elapsed since he and your sister had met, and that it was impossible to endure the separation longer. Are brothers usually so devoted in France? It is not customary here."

Marie gives him a quick, keen, sidelong glance that reminds him once more of Mrs. Windsor. Indeed, in many tricks of manner Marie Landelle resembles her grandmother. But before she can answer, the two they are in search of appear. The band is still playing a lively melody from "*La Fille de Madame Angot*," and the well-dressed throng still surround it. But the music to many there has ceased to be the attraction—M. Durand is the center of many pairs of admiring and interested eyes. There can be no privacy of meeting here, but it is apparent that Marie desires none. She drops Longworth's arm and approaches, and despite the gazing crowd, assumes no welcoming, artificial smile. The eyes that look at him steadfastly are cold, angry, snileless; she does not even extend her hand in pretense of greeting. She bows slightly and frigidly, and will not see the eager hand he offers, the wistful, pleading, reproachful glance he gives her.

"No affectionate embrace here," thinks Longworth,

grimly. "Miss Marie is a young lady of resolution, and knows how to make her displeasure felt. Evidently M. Durand does not stand in the light of a brother to Miss Landelle."

For that first salutation still rankles in his memory. He has asked Reine Landelle to be his wife, and she has promised, but they have met and parted from first to last with the cool courtesy of ordinary acquaintances. And this fellow presumes to kiss her! Does the fact of being brought up together, or the other fact of his being her aunt's step-son give him that right, or is it by the supreme right of mutual love? He has seen the gladness in her eyes—yes, in spite of surprise and fear, the gladness, the welcome have shone through. He has thought her defiant and brave, wilful and perverse perhaps, and none the less charming for it, but open and honest as the day. She has accepted him, and made no mention of any previous attachment or broken engagement. Why has she not told him of this "cousin?" Why is she in the habit of carrying his picture about with her? Why is she afraid of his coming? He has asked her to be his wife; he is ready and willing to wait and to do his utmost to win her heart, but he has not the faintest idea of taking a leap in the dark, of trying to win a heart already given to another. And by the sharpness of the jealous pain the bare thought gives him, Mr. Longworth learns more in that moment of the true state of his own feelings than perhaps he has ever known before.

He stands and furtively watches, as many others are doing, the pantomimes going on before him. He cannot hear a word, but it is apparent M. Durand is eager for Miss Landelle to come with him out of the crowd, it is evident he is anxious to give some explanation—it is evident also that Miss Landelle will neither go nor listen. Her coldly resolute face says plainly to all beholders: "You have come here against my wish—I am angry. You are unwelcome—I will neither go with you, nor listen to you, nor forgive you."

He glances moodily at Reine. Reine looks anxious and distressed; her wish seems to be that of Durand; she apparently pleads with earnestness his cause. But Marie is as calmly inexorable as Fate itself; she turns determinedly away and joins a group of acquaintances. Nothing remains for the other two but to follow her example. The handsome and elegant foreigner is presented, and there is a flutter among the young ladies. He throws off the earnest and pleading look his face has worn, and is at his ease at once with every one, with all the debonair grace of a man well used to the society of women.

"A very unexpected addition," says a voice at Longworth's elbow, and Mrs. Sheldon approaches her cousin. "Who is this Monsieur Durand, Laurence?"

"Monsieur Durand is—Monsieur Durand, and a very good-looking young man, Totty."

"Good-looking! Well, yes, I should call him that. A delightful acquisition. I wonder if he has come to stay?"

"Could you not inquire. I saw him introduced to you."

"Miss Landelle looked annoyed, I thought," pursues Totty, languidly. "She did not even shake hands with him. Reine, on the contrary, clings to his arm in a way that—really—. There, they are moving off together, I declare. Is he any relative, do you know?"

"My dear child, do you think I stood up and demanded M. Durand's biography the moment we met? Miss Landelle is here—had you not better apply to her for his antecedents, since you appear so deeply interested?"

"Oh! I am not interested in *him*," answered Mrs. Sheldon, with emphasis on the personal pronoun. "I only thought—but it is no matter."

"You only thought what?" impatiently.

"That being engaged to Mlle. Reine, you might—but it is all nonsense, of course. Only we know so little of these young ladies, and they seem to have led such odd, wandering

sort of lives, and met so many people, and they tell so little of the past—but of course it is all nonsense."

"I think you must labor under some remarkable hallucination, Mrs. Sheldon," responds Longworth, coolly. "What do you mean by 'odd, wandering sort of lives?' Reine Landelle was brought up by her father's aunt in Rouen, and wandered nowhere, except when she visited her parents in London or visited Italy with her aunt, for that lady's health. This young Durand is the late aunt's step-son—"

"Oh!" objects Totty, innocently opening her light blue eyes, "her step-son? I thought you didn't know."

"I know that much. Mlle. Marie, not having been reared by the aunt, is, as you may see, less intimate with him than her sister. Your tone and look are singularly suggestive, Totty. May I inquire of what?"

"Oh! dear, no—not at all! I really do not mean to suggest anything. Only I thought—but of course, as I said before, that is all nonsense."

Longworth fairly turns upon her savagely.

"For Heaven's sake, Laura, speak out!" he cries, with a scowl. "If there is anything I hate, it is innuendoes. You think what?"

"Laurence, please don't be angry," says Totty, plaintively. She lays one gloved hand on his arm, and looks pleadingly into his flushed and irritated face. "If I cared for your happiness less, I might be more indifferent. What I think is, that Reine Landelle seems to be afraid of this young man. It may be only fancy, but I certainly fancy it, and she is not one to be easily made afraid. Pardon me if I offend you in speaking of her. I know that she is everything to you, and I am nothing, but I cannot forget—"

Mrs. Sheldon is a pretty woman, and in her way not altogether a stupid woman, but she certainly lacks that delicate sixth-sense, tact. A more inopportune moment for sentiment, for recalling the "past," she could not have

chosen. An impatient "Pshaw!" actually escapes Longworth's lips as he turns away.

"Confound the woman and her love-making!" is the savage thought that rises in his mind.

But she has planted her sting, and the poisoned barb rankles. She, too, has seen that glance of inexplicable terror in Reine's eyes, and all Baymouth will be talking of this man and this meeting by to-morrow, and making their own conjectures as to why Mlle. Marie would not shake hands with him, and Mlle. Reine looked afraid of him. He turns away; Mrs. Sheldon's eyes emit one pale, angry gleam as they follow his moody face. Shall he demand imperiously an explanation on their way home, he is thinking, or shall he wait for her to volunteer it? There is an explanation of some sort, of that he is certain. He cannot decide. He will wait and let circumstances decide for him. He looks at his watch—quite time to be starting. He will go for her, and on their homeward drive—

His clouded face clears suddenly. He starts rapidly in the direction they have gone. He has an insuperable aversion to doubts and mysteries—there must be none between him and the woman he marries. She shall have no option in the matter; she *must* speak out on the way home. Friendly she may be with her aunt's step-son, but caresses—no; secrets—no; all that must end at once and forever.

In the heart of Laurence Longworth there is generosity, manliness, and good fellowship in a more than ordinary degree, but blended with them there is a tolerably strong leaven of self-will, selfishness, obstinacy, and jealousy. As a man, men like him; as a friend, women may safely like and trust him; as a lover, he will surely be more or less a tyrant in direct ratio to the degree he loves. He is inclined to carry all before him with a high hand now. Reine must understand that, though her suitor, he is not and never means to be her slave. No one must come between him and his

future wife ; if it is her best friend in the world, then her best friend must be dropped.

If she has mistaken the man she has promised to marry, then there is no time like the present for setting that mistake right. She is thoroughly true, and pure, and good, that he feels ; but all the world must see and acknowledge that truth, and purity, and goodness. Like Cæsar's, Laurence Longworth's wife must be above reproach. His lips compress, his eyes kindle, his face is calm and decided.

' Yes,' he says, "it must end in the beginning. All must be explained on the way home."

CHAPTER XIX.

"SILENT AND TRUE."

THERE is a general movement among the people, as Mr. Longworth makes his way to the spot where he thinks to find Reine. Every one is preparing to go home. Frank Dexter, Miss Hariott, and Miss Landelle go together, and Frank is looking in his turn for the last named young lady.

Longworth passes him, and as he suspects, after a few minutes, comes in sight of Reine and M. Durand. Marie is also with them. The place where they stand is secluded and silent, and as he draws near he hears distinctly some emphatic words. Miss Landelle is the speaker ; she possesses in an eminent degree—indeed, both sisters do—that "excellent thing in woman"—a low, sweet voice, which comes clear from the chest, and has a peculiar distinctness in its lowest accent. The flush of sunset light is full on her face, and he can see the cold, pale, intense anger that makes it like marble

—anger all the more intense perhaps for its perfect outward repression.

"Reine may do as she pleases," these are her chill words. "She has known you longer, and can forgive you more than I. The man who will deliberately, for his own selfish gratification, break his plighted word, is a man so utterly contemptible and despicable, that he is beneath even scorn. And for anything you will gain by coming, you might as well have stayed forever. Either in public or in private I absolutely refuse to——"

She pauses, for Longworth, pursuing his way steadily over the grass, stands before them at the moment. One keen glance takes in the three faces; the white, cold anger of the elder sister, the flushed and downcast face of the younger, with tear-traces still on the cheeks, the darkly handsome, half-sullen, half-impassioned countenance of the young man standing almost like a culprit before them.

"Well, Reine," Mr. Longworth begins, lifting his hat, "if I do not too greatly interrupt you, and you are quite ready——"

She turns to him as he fancies almost with an air of relief, and places her hand on his arm. Marie's face changes instantaneously as she turns brightly to him.

"If it is time for Reine's departure it must also be time for mine. Miss Hariott and I were to return as we came, with——"

"I met Dexter just now, looking for you. Miss Hariott is already in the carriage. If you like I will take you to her."

"Thanks—yes."

She takes Longworth's arm without one parting glance at Durand, and the three move off. But Reine looks back, turning an appealing, wistful, tender little face.

"Adieu, Léonce," she says, "*au revoir*."

He bows to her courteously, then turns on his heel, and walks away.

Miss Landelle takes her place beside Miss Hariott, and Reine passes on to where the low carriage in which Long worth has driven her, stands. He hands her in and takes his place beside her in perfect silence. Once or twice the dark eyes lift and look at him. The stern expression which unconsciously to himself his face wears, bodes no especially pleasant conversation to come. She sighs wearily, and looks with tired eyes that see nothing of the beauty of the sun-steeped landscape straight ahead. He drives slowly, and surely a fairer view never stretched before lovers' eyes. The path that led to the town was called the Bay Road, and was one of the pleasantest and most picturesque of all the Bay-mouth drives. On the right lay the bay, rosy with sunset light, dotted with sparkling sails, on the left fields of corn and buckwheat, and beyond them, stretching far away, the dark, dense "forest primeval." Straight before rose up the black stacks of factory chimneys, the numberless windows of the huge brick factories glinting in the ruby light like sparks of fire. But the two in the carriage see nothing of all this. It has been said, that enough of the leaven of poetic folly yet lingered in the editor of the *Phoenix* to render him keenly sensible of sunset and moon-rise effects, and other atmospheric influences; as a rule, too, he was considered a man of sound sense and logical judgment, but—"To be wise, and love, exceeds man's strength," and he is disposed to be neither wise nor logical just at this moment. He looks like some handsome, blond despot, about to administer firman and bowstring to some far contumacious member of the seraglio.

"You seem tired, Reine," he begins, his eyes upon her with a cold keenness that makes her shrink and shiver. "You look bored, you look ill, you look, strange to say, as though you had been crying."

She makes no reply. She sits gazing across at the pink flush upon the water.

"The unexpected coming of M. Durand has not been, I fear, a wholly unalloyed delight. Taking people by surprise is mostly a mistake. And yet you were glad to see him, I think?"

He makes this assertion with emphasis, and looks at her for reply. She speaks slowly.

"I was glad to see him—yes. I shall always be glad to see Léonce."

Her color returns a little as she says it. It is to be war between them, and though she may prefer peace, if war is to be made, she is not disposed to turn coward. The *tête-à-tête* is not to be an agreeable one, and she braces herself for her part in it.

"Your sister hardly appears to share in your gladness. His *coup de théâtre*—(he has rather the look of a theatrical gentleman, by the way)—is evidently singularly unwelcome to her. For you, mademoiselle, if it were not the wildest supposition in the world, I should say——"

"Yes!" she says, her dark eyes kindling; "go on."

"That you were afraid of him."

He hears her catch her breath with a quick, nervous sound, but she laughs shortly.

"You watch well, monsieur! What other wild suppositions have you formed? Had I known I was under surveillance I might have been on guard. For the future I will endeavor to be more careful."

She meets his glance now fully, daringly, defiantly. He is determined to have war, and she is singularly reckless and disposed to oblige him. A green gleam on one of her hands catches his eye—it is a ring and she is slowly turning it round and round. A ring on the finger of Reine Landelle is something remarkable. Except the traditional diamond solitaire he himself has given her, and which she has worn since their engagement, he has never seen a ring on the small brown hand. The heat has caused her to remove both gloves, they

lie a crumpled ball in her lap, and on the first finger of her left hand he sees now an emerald of beauty and price.

"A pretty ring, Reine," he says. "You never wore it before. It is quite new to me."

"It is quite new to me also, monsieur,"

"Ah—you did not have it on this morning."

"No, M. Longworth, I did not."

"Probably"—he flecks the off horse lightly with his whip as he speaks—"it is a gift from your cousin and brother M. Durand?"

"Monsieur's penetration does him credit. It is from M. Durand."

"He has selected an unfortunate color, I am afraid. Green means forsaken, or faithless, or something of the sort, does it not?"

"If it does then his choice has been prophetic," she says, looking down at it, and speaking it seems as much to herself as to him.

"Indeed!" He looks at her steadfastly, so steadfastly and long that her color rises. "But faith may be restored, may it not, and the forsaken be recalled? It is never too late for anything of that kind while people live. Let me see it."

She draws it off her finger without a word, the defiance of her manner more defiant than ever. It is a thick band of gold, set with one emerald, large, limpid—a jewel of beauty and price. And inside on the smooth gold are these words:

"SILENT AND TRUE."

"A pretty ring," Longworth repeats, and gives it back, "and a pretty motto. One hardly knows which to admire most."

"To a man of M. Longworth's practical turn, surely the emerald," Reine retorts. "Silence and truth are virtues with which he is hardly likely to credit so poor a creature as a woman."

"That is your mistake, mademoiselle. I believe, for instance, you can be both silent and true."

He sees her eyes flash, her whole dark face kindle and flush.

"Yes," she cries, "to those who trust me, to those who love me, when the time comes I can be both."

"And those who trust and love you are here, and the time has come?"

"Monsieur Longworth," she exclaims, and turns upon him fast, "what do you mean? You suspect me of something—will you tell me of what?"

"I saw him kiss you," he answers, roughly and abruptly, fire and passion in his voice.

She is still looking at him coldly, proudly. As he says these words the color flushes redly over her whole face. It is the very first time he has ever seen her blush like this among all the changes of her changeful face. She turns all at once and drops it like a shamed child into her hands.

"Oh," she says, under her breath, "do you care?"

Something—he cannot tell what—in the blush, in the impulsive, childish, shamefaced action, in the startled words, touch him curiously, but it is no time to let her see he is moved.

"Well, in a general way," he answers coolly, "men do object to seeing another man go through that sort of performance with the lady they expect to marry, naturally preferring to retain the patent-right themselves. Now, it is a right I have never asserted, never intend to assert until we come to a more friendly understanding than we did that night by the garden wall. I may ask a lady to marry—who professes no regard for me, hoping in time to win that regard, but pending the winning I enforce no claim—such mutual love alone can give any man the right. And it may very well be that the fact of all privileges being departed, we may make me the more jealous and intolerant of those privileges be-

ing accorded to another man. I do not pain you, I hope, Mlle. Reine, and I trust you understand me?"

She may understand him, but he certainly has never understood her—less to-day than ever. She lifts her head as he ceases, and asks him the strangest question, it seems to him, ever woman asked.

"Monsieur Longworth," she says and looks him straight in the eyes, "you have asked me to marry you—you prefer me to Marie—you say you wish to win my regard. Answer me this—are you in love with me?"

He is so honestly, so absolutely amazed, so utterly taken aback, that for a moment he cannot find words to reply. This is certainly carrying the war into Africa, in a way which that imperious enemy has never dreamed of. He calls himself a man free from prejudice, but no man lives free from prejudice where he fancies the delicacy of the woman he loves is concerned, and—he is shocked. Her matchless audacity takes away his breath.

"Mademoiselle," he says, "I have asked you to be my wife. You are answered."

"Bah! You have asked one of Mrs. Windsor's heiresses. You have not answered. But I can read my sentence in your face—I am bold, unfeminine—I infringe on man's sole prerogative. I ask a question no woman has a right to ask. All the same, it might be better for us both if you answered."

"If I answer 'I am,' and ask a return, are you prepared to give it?"

"No."

"If I answer 'I am,' are you ready to tell me exactly, what tie binds you to Léonce Durand?"

"No."

"Then pardon me if I decline in turn. A lady's rights are limitless, and yet a man may be excused for declining to give all and receive nothing."

"And yet," she says, with a slow, bitter smile, "there are men who do it."

"Meaning Monsieur Léonce Durand?"

"Meaning Léonce Durand, if you like. He is quite capable of it."

"But surely that is not exacted. I think he receives something. I really see no reason why he should be dissatisfied. A lady accepts his ring and his embraces both with equal readiness and pleasure; she declines taking into his confidence and her own the man she stands pledged to marry. Of the two she greatly prefers and trusts him, beyond all dispute. No, I see no reason why he should complain."

"Monsieur Longworth," Reine cries, turning upon him, her temper held partly in until now, refusing to be held in a moment longer, "enough of this! Do you want to quarrel with me? Do you want me to give you up? Please say so, if you do. It is better to understand one another. I dislike quarreling, and my head aches."

Her voice trembles and breaks for the first time. Her head does ache throbbingly, and she puts her hand to it with a weary, hopeless sort of gesture. In a moment he is touched and remorseful.

"I beg your pardon," he says, penitently, with a swift and total change of manner. "Yes, I see it aches. I won't annoy you any more. Petite Reine, forgive me."

She has been overwrought, excited, terrified, troubled; the unexpected change in him from cold sarcasm to kindness is too much for her. She bows her face in her hands, and he knows that she is crying.

"Oh, forgive me!" he exclaims. "This is too bad! I am a brute! Reine—dear Little Queen——"

He half-encircles her with his arm. Is the question asked by her so haughtily a moment ago, declined by him so coldly, about to be tenderly answered now? If so, fate interposes. Wheels that have been gaining upon them for some time

crash close behind; he has just time to remove his arm, when the barouche containing Mr. and Mrs. Beckwith, Mrs. Sheldon, and Léonce Durand himself, rolls past.

"Reine, for Heaven's sake!" he cries, with a man's horror of a scene; "here are all these people——"

But he need not fear. His half caress has startled her into composure more effectively than the barouche. She sits resolutely erect, ready to return the quartet of bows with proud composure. The barouche keeps just ahead, to the unspeakable disgust of Longworth, and the intense relief of Reine. Mrs. Sheldon sits with M. Durand, facing them, her back to the horses, and it seems to Longworth that those small steadfast blue eyes are reading their faces like printed pages. Nothing more can be said, and one of life's golden opportunities is forever lost.

What can Durand be doing there in that carriage with that party, is the thought of both; but he is an explosive subject, like nitro-glycerine, dangerous to touch never so lightly, so neither make any remark. They are flashing through the streets of the town by this time, and all the rubies and purples of the sunset have faded out into pallid grays. Madame Windsor, who has not gone to the Exhibition, has invited Mr. Longworth, Mr. Dexter, and Miss Hariott to dine with her upon their return. The other three have not yet arrived, but Reine has only had time to go up stairs, and bathe her hot face, when Marie throws open the door and enters.

"Reine!" she exclaims, with singular abruptness for her, "in the name of Heaven, what is to be done now?"

"I do not know," Reine answers, despairingly.

"To think of his coming after all his promises! To think of his rashness, his selfishness, his insane folly! Reine! Reine! this is ruin to us all."

"I know it," Reine answers again, in the same despairing tone.

"Already Laurence Longworth suspects; I could see it

"SILENT AND TRUE."

in his eye, those cold, keen, pitiless blue eyes, that see everything. I trembled for you when we parted. Petite, was the drive home very dreadful?"

Reine makes an impassioned gesture that speaks volumes.

"Ah! I knew it. Chère Petite, how sorry I am for you. What did he say?"

"Marie, do not ask me. He had the right to say all he said, and more. It is all wrong and treacherous, and false and miserable together."

"If grandmamma hears—and she must surely hear, everything is known to everybody in this stupid gossiping town—we are lost. He is so reckless, so insane. Oh, *Mon Dieu!* why did he come!"

"Marie, he had the right to come——"

"Right! You are always talking of right. He has no right to come here and ruin us. He is base and false, he has broken his promise, and I will never forgive him for it. No!" Marie Landelle says, uplifting one white hand, "I will never forgive him to my dying day."

"Marie!"

"I will never forgive him—and you know me, Reine—I am not one to say and not do. For you—oh, Petite, be careful, be prudent; don't meet him, don't answer if he writes, try and coax or frighten him into going away. You may care for him, if you will, but I wish—I wish—I wish with all my heart I had never seen his face."

She says it in a voice whose bitter earnestness there is no mistaking. Reine looks at her almost angrily.

"Marie, this is wicked, this is intolerable. You have no right——"

"Right again! Ah, Petite, what a foolish child you are. It is all his own fault, and I say again from the bottom of my heart, I wish I had never seen Léonce Durand. Reine, take off that ring—how imprudent to wear it. Why, Mr. Longworth might have seen it."

"He has seen it, Marie."

"Reine!"

"He asked me who gave it to me and I told him; he took it off and read the motto; he is jealous and angry, and suspects more than I care to think. Oh, Marie, I said from the first it was all wrong to come."

Marie sits for a moment looking crushed. Then the old steadfast expression returns.

"Reine," she says, calmly, "give me that ring," and Reine wearily obeys. "At least all is not lost that's in danger, and we need not accept defeat without a struggle. Ah! what a pity it is, when all was going so well—grandmamma almost reconciled, you engaged to her favorite, life so pleasant and free from care——"

"And Frank Dexter so infatuatedly in love with you, don't leave that out," Reine interrupts, coldly.

"I shall struggle for my place here until the very last," goes on Miss Landelle, unheeding; "if I am defeated it will be because fate is stronger than I. Help me, Reine, and make Léonce go away. You can do it."

"Can I? I doubt it. He went home this afternoon with Madame Sheldon—that looks as if he had made up his mind to stop at her house for some time."

"Good Heaven! And there he will meet Mr. Longworth daily."

"And Mr. Dexter, do not forget him."

"I am not afraid of Dexter, I am of your argus-eyed fiancé. Well!—there is the bell—there is nothing for it but to do one's best and wait."

The sisters descend, and Longworth notices at once that the emerald has left Reine's hand. He sees too the constraint of her manner, her lack of appetite, her silence and depression. Miss Harriott also observes it, and wonders if in any way the arrival of the very handsome young Frenchman has anything to do with it. In some way the conversation drifts

to him, his name is mentioned, and Mrs. Windsor lifts two surprised, displeased, and inquiring eyes to the face of Miss Landelle.

"Monsieur Durand—a friend of my granddaughters? Who is this gentleman, Marie?"

"No one very formidable, grandmamma. A sort of cousin of Reine's, her aunt's step-son, and her companion from childhood."

"What brings him here?"

"Really I do not know. To see the country, in the first place, I presume—to see us in the second."

"Monsieur Durand is then, I infer, a man of means?"

"Yes—no—he is not rich, certainly, as you count riches here, but I suppose he has a competence at least."

"You appear out of spirits, Mlle. Reine," says Mrs. Windsor, who seldom addresses her younger granddaughter without the prefix; "does the coming of this relative annoy you?"

"His coming has annoyed me, Madame—yes," Reine responds.

"Might one venture to ask why?"

There is silence. Mrs. Windsor's brow is overcast. Reine's eyes are fixed on her plate—she seems unable, or resolved not to answer. Marie comes swiftly and smilingly to the rescue.

"The truth is," she says, with an outbreak of frankness, "Léonce is an opera-bouffe singer, and has crossed with a company from Paris, to sing in New York, and Reine, who is proud in spite of her demureness, is half-ashamed to mention it."

Reine does not look up, does not speak. Mrs. Windsor's brow darkens more and more.

"That is odd, too," she says, icily, "since I understand mademoiselle makes no secret of having been trained for the operatic stage herself. Opera-singing appears to have run in the family of the late Madame Durand."

Every one sits, feeling warm and uncomfortable, during this discussion. Frank shows his discomfort, Longworth wears his impassive mask, Miss Hariott is nervous. Something causes her to distrust Marie and her frank announcement of Durand's profession—Reine has not indorsed her statement by look, or sign, or word.

Longworth, too, seemingly absorbed in iced pudding, also notices. Something lies behind the opera-bouffe—something both sisters are ashamed of, afraid of.

"Our French friend, with the *primo tenore* voice and air, is evidently a black sheep, a very speckly potato, and the nightmare of these young demoiselles," he thinks. "If Reine would only be frank and trust me, and tell me all."

But Reine tells nothing, and the evening that ensues is rather dreary to all, except Frank, who, beside his idol, is ever in a perfect bathos of bliss. Reine sings, and the others play whist, but the music is melancholy, and the card party dull. Even Miss Hariott's constitutional good spirits feel the depression and out-of-sorts sensation that usually follows a hot day's sight-seeing, and she is glad when eleven comes, and she can rise and go home.

"Am I forgiven?" Longworth says, in a low voice, to Reine, as he holds out his hand at parting. "I pained you to-day by my fancies; I will try and not offend in the future."

But he has stung and wounded Reine more deeply than he knows, and she is not disposed to accord pardon and peace at a word.

"Monsieur Longworth is a poet and a novelist; he possesses a brilliant imagination, and fancies many things, no doubt. But for the vagaries of that imagination it is hardly fair to hold me accountable. He is, however, so far as I am concerned, at liberty to fancy what he pleases."

He turns pale with anger and surprise.

"Thanks," he says, and drops her hand. "I will avail myself of the kind permission."

He has thought she will only be too glad to meet the olive branch half way; for this bold defiance he is not prepared. But he is obliged to own to himself that he has never thought her so nearly beautiful as when she looks up at him with those brightly, darkly angry eyes, and braves him to his face. He almost laughs aloud as he thinks of this novel and remarkable way of winning a woman's heart.

"Was ever woman in this humor wooed—was ever woman in this humor won?" he thinks, grimly. But—oh, humiliating fact to woman!—because another man values his prize, he is doubly determined to win it, values it himself for that reason the more, and under the blue starlight registers a vow to all the gods, that he, not this intrusive Frenchman, shall win and wear Reine Landelle.

CHAPTER XX.

"TO BE WISE, AND LOVE, EXCEEDS MAN'S STRENGTH."



A DARK and sultry August evening; the sky black, overcast, and threatening rain. In Mrs. Longworth's boarding-house many lights are lit, all the windows stand wide, mosquito-nets drawn across, wooing the breeze that never comes. Even on the bay the breath of air stirs this oppressive evening—it lies all black and breezeless under the low-lying sky, only murmuring in a sort of ominous splash down on the beach below.

Mrs. Sheldon sits by the window of her room, the muslin curtains drawn to screen her from passing eyes, her fair, nearly colorless eyebrows bent in profound thought, one foot tapping impatiently the hassock upon which it rests. Dinner is over; she can hear voices and laughter down on the stoop, and the odor of cigars comes floating up. As she listens with

an intent look, she can hear the harmonious foreign accented voice of Léonce Durand, his low, sarcastic laughter—she can even, leaning out, catch a glimpse of his slender figure as he leans negligently against one of the vine-wreathed pillars, and gesticulates and talks. The light from the parlor lamps streams over the dark Southern beauty of his face; his very attitude is full of easy debonair grace; his voice is singularly sympathetic and musical, but there is much less of feminine admiration than baffled feminine curiosity in the pale, puzzled blue eyes that regard him.

"Who is he?" she thinks. "What is he to Reine Landelle? Why has he come here? Why does he remain? Why are both these French girls afraid of him? For even the elder, in spite of the cold disdain with which she treats him, is afraid of him, I can see, in her secret heart. But Reine—if I only knew what he is to her—if I only knew what this letter means."

She takes her pocket-book out, opens it, and draws forth a torn scrap of paper. It is a fragment of a letter, torn across, a portion of one corner, it seems, written in French, in a light, delicate hand. She has chanced upon it in Durand's room, this very day, lying with a heap of charred scraps in the empty grate.

Mrs. Sheldon's familiarity with the French language is not great, but it is sufficient, with the help of a dictionary, to translate this scrap into English. So translated it is still puzzling:

"useless for you to ask
will never forgive you
meet you this once.
danger in chander-
truth suspected
culp and
must go
R. L."

"R. L. Reine Landelle, of course, is the writer. I know that Mrs. Windsor has forbidden him her house from the first. What is it that it is useless for him to ask? What is it she will never forgive him? where and when is she to meet him? what is the truth that is suspected? what does that word ruin mean? 'Must go'—but he has no intention of going. If I could only understand. This much is easily enough understood—there is some important secret between him and Reine Landelle, and where there is secrecy there must be guilt. Mrs. Windsor has forbidden all intercourse, and yet she meets him clandestinely. And Laurence is proud and inflexible, stern and unforgiving to plotting, or treachery, or falsity. What if, after all, I can take him from her yet?"

She replaces the torn scrap carefully, and, still with knitted brows and closed lips, muses intently.

"To think of his falling in love with her—that little, dark, plain creature! And after all those years, when I thought, and I fancy he thought, the capability was gone forever. They say we always return to our first loves, and but for her—Oh! if I had only known in the past—if I had only been a woman instead of a child—if mamma had not come between us, or if that dead summer could only return! He gave up for my sake home and fortune, and went out into the world to poverty and hard work, and I let my mother do with me as she chose, and married a man I cared no more for than any stranger who walked the streets. And now—now when it is too late—"

She rises with strange emotion, strange impetuosity, for one so phlegmatic and unemotional, and begins walking up and down.

"Is it too late?" she thinks; is it indeed too late? I will not believe it! Some of that old passion must still remain. If Reine Landelle were only out of my way! If I could only plot and lay plans, as they do in books! But women do such impossible things in books, and I have no head for

plotting. Surely, though, with the help of this torn letter and Léonce Durand, I can do something. If I only knew what secret is between them ! "

An outbreak of laughter comes up from the piazza. She goes to the window, and leans feverishly out. Longworth is not there, Dexter is not there, but all the other gentlemen are, and O'Sullivan's mellow bass leads the laugh. Durand is telling some story with inimitable drollery and mimicry, and joins with genial good will in the burst of merriment that follows. He is the life of the house, his fund of anecdote, repartee, epigram, and racy satire seems exhaustless ; he plays upon the piano like a professional ; he sings like a lesser Mario, he dances like a Frenchman, he bows and pays compliments with the easy grace of a court chamberlain. What is there charming that this handsome and elegant Monsieur Durand does not ? In a week he has won golden opinions from all sorts of people. Men vote him a prince of good fellows—a little too much of a dandy and lady's man, but a thorough good fellow all the same. Ladies one and all pronounce him "perfectly splendid," and fall in love with him without an effort. He is denied admission to Mrs. Windsor's ; it is whispered about that he is a negro minstrel, an opera bouffe singer. Has not Miss Landell'e said so in Frank Dexter's hearing—Frank Dexter who alone hates him ferociously. A mystery of some sort envelops him in a delicious haze, and all these things go to make him still more irresistibly attractive. He has fought the Prussian Uhlans, been wounded at Versailles, taken prisoner at Sedan. What is there that Monsieur Durand has not done, can not do ? Where is there he has not been, and whether opera singer or exiled prince, his pockets at least are well-filled. Adventurer he may be, needy adventurer he is not. He wears the best clothes, smokes the best cigars, drives the best horses, money can procure.

He is also an adept in sundry little games of skill, and has

proven, once or twice, over the card-table, to the satisfaction (or otherwise) of Mrs. Longworth's boarders, that he can win the dollars of the gentlemen as easily and gracefully as the hearts of the ladies. With it all he is a puzzle. Seemingly he is frankness itself on all subjects; the airy, surface manner he wears seems transparent as glass, and still he is baffling. There are times when the boarders think they know all about him—why he is here, how he stands with the Demoiselles Landelle; and, after all, at the end of the first week, they have to acknowledge they still know nothing.

"Half-past eight," Mrs. Sheldon hears him say, as she stands looking and listening; "I have an engagement at nine. *Messieurs, à demain—good-night.*"

He runs down the steps.

"Capital little fellow!" she hears Mr. Beckwith say. "Never thought a foreigner could be half so cute. You don't catch me playing vinty-une with him again in a hurry, nor euchre either. Knows a sight too much about both for my money—a cool card and a knowing one."

Monsieur Durand has lit a cigar, and moved off, after the fashion of the duke in Rigoletto singing, "*La donna è mobile.*"

An engagement at nine. What can it be? A sudden thought strikes Mrs. Sheldon. She hastily catches up a light shawl and hat, leaves her room, runs down a pair of back stairs, and so out, unseen by the people on the stoop, into the street.

M. Durand is a gentleman of leisure, a believer, evidently, in the Arabic maxim that "Hurry is the devil's." He does not hurry now, he walks away quite slowly, still humming, under his breath, the air from the opera, and Mrs. Sheldon without the least trouble keeps him in view. Is he going to the Stone House? Is the engagement, announced with such cool audacity, the assignation of the letter? Is he going to meet Reine Landelle?

A moment decides the first question. He turns into the street leading to Mrs. Windsor's. Laura Sheldon, her heart beating fast with the excitement of the chase, follows. He reaches the gate, opens it, enters, and disappears. There can no longer be a doubt—he has come to meet Reine Landelle in response to Reine Landelle's letter.

She draws close to the gate, concealed by trees, and waits in a fever of excitement and exultation. What will Laurence say to this? Laurence, fastidious, ridiculously fastidious about the reserve and delicacy of young girls even in trifles. A few breathless moments of suspense, and then the house door opens, and in the lighted entrance she sees distinctly the face of Reine. It quickly closes, the night and darkness wrap her rival—she sees and hears no more.

Still she lingers. It is not likely he will stay long—Reine will not permit herself to be missed. In this surmise she is correct. Fifteen minutes have barely elapsed, when, without sound to warn her of his approach, Léonce Durand hastily opens the gate, and stands almost beside her. Her heart seems to stop beating for a moment—she cannot see his face distinctly in that obscurity, and it may be her fancy that it looks angry and lowering. A second later and he is gone, and she stands alone under the shadow of the elms.

Among the sheaf of letters next morning's mail brings to the editor of the *Phenix* there is one over which he knits his brows, and scowls in a manner so savage, that Mr. O'Sullivan, who chanced to be in the sanctum at the moment, pauses in his work to stare.

"Upon me word, chief, that's a mighty pretty expression to have your photograph taken in. What has our esteemed correspondent said to throw ye into such a tearing passion? It's not a billet-doux ye have, I'm thinking."

"Look at that writing, O—did you ever see it before?"

He flings him the envelope, an ordinary buff one, and O'Sullivan inspects it gravely.

"Never chief, and never want to again. 'A d—d crabbed piece of penmanship,' as Uncle Toby has it, as ever I looked at."

"Seems like a feigned hand, does it not?"

"Well—that's as may be. A woman trying a man's fist might execute such chirography. Nothing unpleasant I hope, chief?"

"An anonymous letter—nothing more."

But the scowl still lingers on Longworth's visage, as he crumples the epistle into a ball, thrusts it into his pocket, and begins writing with a ferocious rapidity. He writes until O'Sullivan has left the room, then throws down the pen, takes out the crumpled letter, smooths it, and frowning darkly, glances vindictively over it once more.

"A Sincere Friend wishes to offer Mr. Longworth a word of advice. The inclosed scrap of writing came into his possession by accident, and through the carelessness of M. Léonce Durand, whose property it is. The initials at the end are not to be mistaken. Last night the assignation made in this torn letter was kept in the grounds of the Stone House. Monsieur Léonce Durand and Mademoiselle Reine Landelle met there at nine o'clock. A Sincere Friend wishes Mr. Longworth would discover what the exact relation of this very handsome young man is to Mlle. R. Landelle—why he is here—why they meet by night and by stealth—before he makes her his wife."

Inclosed is the torn corner of the French letter signed "R. L."

All honorable men and women, as a matter of course, despise anonymous letters, and yet do those poisoned stilettos ever quite miss their mark? Longworth crushes this in a fury and flings it from him, only to pick it up for the second time, and regard it with loathing. Was this accusation true?

did Reine indeed meet by night and by stealth this step-son of her aunt? Well, and if she did—was it after all so unnatural? He was her friend—her brother, as Marie had said; she had known him all her life. Mrs. Windsor had absolutely forbidden him the house—how then were they to meet except by stealth? And yet the thought that they met at all stung him like a whip. She was watched, suspected, talked of, this girl he meant to marry—there was something horribly revolting in the idea. Innocence, purity itself, she might be—was, he knew—and yet one such letter, one such maligner as this, was enough to spot the fairest reputation. "Be you pure as ice, chaste as snow, you shall not escape calumny"—perhaps not; but if the calumny have the shadow of truth to build upon, how then? What if this vile, nameless thing spoke truth? what if Reine met Durand? what if she were in the habit of meeting him?

All that day editors, reporters, compositors, the very printer's devil, notice that the chief is in a white and silent rage. Every article he dashes off is steeped in the very gall of bitterness. On the editorial page goes in a brief, bitterly scathing article headed "Anonymous Letters," in which every epithet almost in the English language is hurled at the heads of the perpetrators of that atrocity. But he keeps his chair until his usual hour for departure, and O'Sullivan, glancing up as he passes, observes that a look of dogged resolution has replaced the fiercely-repressed, silent fury of the morning.

"Upon my honor and conscience, I hope no more anonymous epistles will reach ye, for it's a fine savage temper ye've been in all day. Surely it wasn't anything about the little mad-mo-zel; and yet that's the only thing that could upset him to such a degree. Something about her and the good-looking little Frenchman, I'll wager a button. If I only had the cut-throat that wrote it for five minutes, the Lord look to him! Devil another anonymous letter he'd write this month of Sundays."

Mr. Longworth goes home, dines, still rather stern and silent, but with all indications of anger gone. He glances keenly across at Durand. That elegant and gay young foreigner is in high feather, as usual, and is flirting with Mrs. Beckwith, to that coquettish little matron's heart's content. He has frankly corroborated Miss Landelle's statement—yes, he is an operatic singer, has been for years, but his engagement does not begin before October, and meantime he has run down here to see their charming town, and pay a visit to his still more charming friends, the Demoiselles Landelle. True, the imperial grandmamma does not like him, he regrets to say; she dislikes Frenchmen, probably, M. Durand gayly infers, on the principle of the burnt child who dreads fire. It grieves him, but what would you? he strives to survive it. He likes Baymouth; the fishing is excellent, Madame Longworth's house and family, all that there is of the most charming (a smile and bow that comprises all the ladies); he sees no reason why he should not linger in these pleasant pastures until the ides of October arrive.

"Of course not," Mr. Beckwith agrees, "a better place to loaf away the blazing days couldn't be found. Sea-breezes, nice trout streams, pa'tridges later on, comfortable family, as you say, munseer, airy house, pretty girls, French and Yankee, married, widowed, and single," adds Mr. Beckwith, with an unctuous chuckle. "What say, Franky, my boy?—you ain't looking well, I think. Capital succotash, Mrs. Longworth; may I trouble you for a second help?"

So Durand means to stay until the close of September, five more weeks. Mrs. Beckwith looks radiant, Mrs. Sheldon casts a quick glance at Longworth, but Longworth's mask is on, and he is absorbed in his dinner. Frank Dexter darkly scowls, and poniards a French roll, as if it were M. Durand he has impaled on his fork. He is jealous of Durand, more jealous than he has ever been of Longworth, although that fact is not in itself remarkable, Mr. Dexter being

jealous to a perfectly frightful degree, of every man upon whom the light of Marie Landelle's golden eyes chances to fall. He certainly seems to have very little cause in the present instance, but jealous souls make their own causes. She has known Durand long ago—who is to tell how intimately,—and though she avoids him now with a marked avoidance, that is in itself suspicious, though her coldness of manner is more than Arctic when she chances to meet him, that only roots the distrust of this moody, miserable young Bluebeard still more. And now the fellow is going to remain five whole weeks longer.

Monsieur Durand's pleasant and polite little speech throws settled gloom over Mr. Dexter for the remainder of the meal. He quits the house the instant it is over, and a few minutes later Longworth goes down the piazza steps in his turn and takes the same direction. Durand stands on the stoop, a curious, and not altogether pleasant smile on his dark face, as he watches the twilight out of sight.

"The same loadstar draws both," says the voice of Mrs. Sheldon beside him, "the Stone House. My cousin Laurence's is quite an old affair by this time, as no doubt you know. Mr. Dexter's does not appear as yet to be settled, but a young man with a fortune so princely need hardly fear a rejection when he makes up his mind to speak."

M. Durand has removed his cigar out of deference to the lady—now he looks at her with a smile still on his handsome face.

"Ah!" he says airily, "so Mr. Longworth's affair is quite settled? Yes, as you say, La Petite told me from the first. Happy Monsieur Longworth! And M. Dexter's is not quite—do I understand you to say, madame, that he is very rich?"

"A prince, if I may. The heir of nobody knows how many millions."

"Vague, but delightful! Millions! How exquisite the

sound of that word! How fortunate are my fair cousins!"

"Monsieur Durand, they are not your cousins."

"No? But it is all the same, is it not? We are of one family. And you think when Mr. Dexter speaks Mlle. Marie will not say no? Why should she? It is a most brilliant match even for Madame Windsor's heiress. Ah! that terrible Madame Windsor! who shuts her doors in my face, as if I were an ambitious lover, instead of a brother, a cousin, altogether harmless, and meant to carry off one of her granddaughters under the very noses of messieurs, the favored ones."

He laughs lightly, and looks longingly at his cigar. He smokes almost as steadily as Longworth himself.

"Don't mind me, monsieur; smoke if you wish to. And you did carry off one of the granddaughters I don't think it would surprise Baymouth very greatly. It does not seem to regard you as the harmless cousin or brother—which do you prefer?—that you claim to be."

Again Durand laughs, as he resumes his cigar, bowing his thanks for the gracious permission.

"Mr. Dexter for example. My faith, how like Othello he looked at dinner, when I announced my intention of remaining still a few weeks."

"Yes, I think Frank is jealous; but Frank, poor boy, is jealous of every one who so much as looks at his divinity. She is wonderfully pretty, Mlle. Landelle; the prettiest woman you ever saw, is she not?"

"Pardon, madame—not at all. Very pretty, I grant you—the very prettiest—no!"

The look of Durand's dark eyes, the slight smile, the almost imperceptible bow, bring a faint flush of gratified vanity even to Mrs. Sheldon's cool cheek. But she laughs.

"Of course. I deserve it. My question sounded, no doubt, as if I wanted such an answer. All the same, I know

there is no one in Baymouth half so handsome. But it is not Miss Landelle they say who is your friend, in spite of her beauty."

Once more Durand laughs, thoroughly and unaffectedly amused. Does this rather faded young widow expect him to commit himself to her, to satisfy her curiosity, to own himself the lover of Reine? Before he can reply, Mrs. Beckwith has fluttered to his side, and claims his promise to teach her an Italian song, and so makes an end of the conversation.

Mr. Dexter calls at the Stone House, and finds Mlle. Marie reading in the garden. Mr. Longworth, upon his arrival a few minutes later, finds that Mlle. Reine is not at home; she is somewhere in the grounds, or down on the sands, her sister thinks. Mr. Longworth goes in search of her, and presently afar off on the sandy shore he catches a glimpse of a gray robe, a fluttering blue ribbon, and a slight solitary figure seated on a rock. He vaults over the low wall, and turns in the direction at once. The summer evening is at its loveliest—bright, windless, mellow with the sweet scent of the sea on the still air, a few pearly stars already ashine, although the pale pink and primrose of the sunset have not quite faded out of the pale fleecy sky. Hushed and tranquil the bay lies, the little waves whispering and murmuring up on the shore, a gold gray haze lying over the distant towns. Reine sits, a book in her lap, but not reading, the dark eyes with the far-off distant light in them, her lover has learned to know, fixed on the silent shining water, as if away beyond the rosy horizon yonder they looked once more for

— "thy corn-fields green, and sunny vines,
Oh! pleasant land of France."

As the footsteps approach she glances up, and that pleased look of welcome, Longworth of late has more than once seen, comes into her face. Perhaps it is only that she is





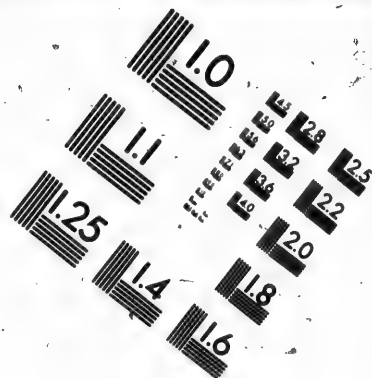
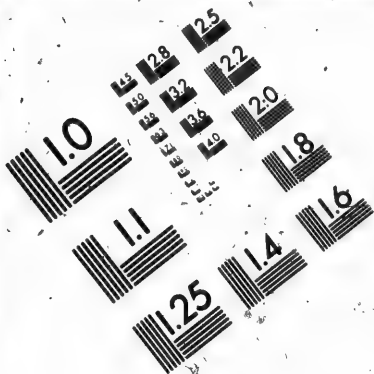
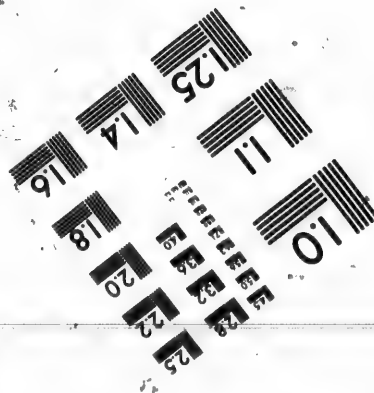
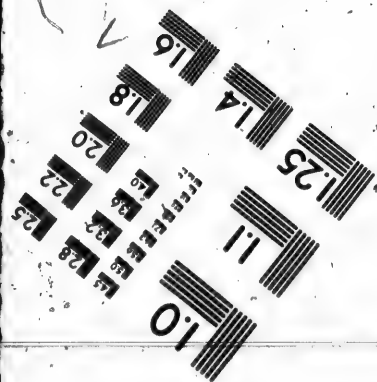
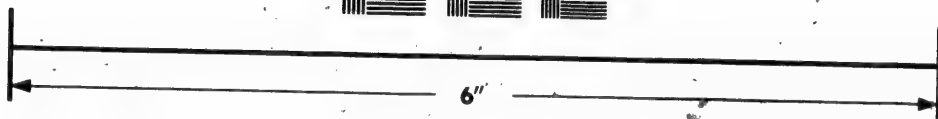
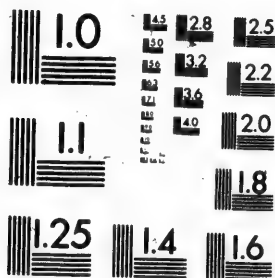


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weary of solitude, and is glad of the interruption. There are times when this demure little gray-robed maiden seems a true daughter of her native land, when she knows how to look up with a certain coquettish and alluring grace in the face of her chosen foe, and this is one. She smiles brightly for just one second, then the lids droop over the dark eyes, and she sits waiting for him to address her.

"I am fortunate in finding you alone, Mademoiselle Reine, and here. It is a quiet place; we can talk without fear of interruption, and that is something which does not often happen. But, first, are you quite well? I have not seen you for three days."

"I am quite well, monsieur."

"You are pale, I think—you are not looking as well as you used. But I suppose the hot weather is exhausting."

Mlle. Reine makes no reply. Is this what he desires to say without fear of interruption? The sudden momentary brightness has left her face, she sits expectant, with down-drooped eyes, tracing figures with the points of her parasol in the sand. Whatever he has followed her here to say it is nothing agreeable, that she feels. There is no lover's look in his face, no lover's tone in his voice. He stands beside her in the fair evening light, looking remarkably stern, and resolute and inflexible indeed for a wooer.

"Reine," he says, speaking quickly, "my errand to night is no pleasant one, but duty is duty and not to be shirked. I received a letter this morning, an anonymous letter, and it concerns you."

She glances up, the straight black brows contracting after a fashion he knows well.

"An anonymous letter and concerning me?"

"Here it is." He takes it out of his pocket, and places it in her hand. "I know—every one knows how utterly contemptible such a thing is, but like all insidious poison it hardly ever fails to plant its sting. I could not destroy it

without consulting you; the memory of what it says would rankle in spite of me. Read it—I ask only one word of denial and I pledge myself never even to think of it again."

Her face has paled slightly, but she opens it with a steady hand, and reads both letter and inclosure without tremor or pause. Then she calmly refolds them and hands both back without a word.

"Well!" he exclaims impatiently, "have you nothing to say—nothing to deny?"

"I have very little to say—nothing to deny. What your Sincere Friend tells you is quite true."

"Quite true! You met Monsieur Durand then, last night, at nine in the grounds?"

"I did."

"This torn scrap of writing is from you to him?"

"Undoubtedly."

There is a pause. He crumples the snake in his hand into a ball, and flings it out into the sea.

"Reine," he says abruptly, and in a voice of whose harshness he is not aware, "this must end. One of two things must happen—our engagement must cease, or this intimacy with Durand must be broken off. It may be perfectly innocent—of you I have no doubt—but people are beginning to talk, and the amount of the matter is it won't do. My future wife must be the subject of no anonymous letters, must meet no man in darkness and in secret."

"How then am I to meet him?" she demands, with a proud calmness that surprises him, but a dangerous light kindling in her eyes. "He is my friend—I care for him more than perhaps you would wish to hear; Madame Windsor has forbidden him her house. What would monsieur have me do?"

"Abide by your grandmother's decision. Anything is better than being spied upon and talked of like this."

"But, my grandmother's decision is most unjust. She

knows nothing to the discredit of M. Durand. Does it not seem rather the act of a craven and cringing spirit, to give up an old and very dear friend, at a word from a rich and tyrannical relation?"

"While you accept the shelter of that relation's roof, mademoiselle, you are bound to obey."

"She looks up at him, stern, inflexible, stubbornly just, with eyes afire.

"You do well," she says, in a passionate undertone.

"Oh! you do well to remind me of that. I am her slave—*Mon Dieu!* I know it well, and should obey every command. Am I also to be yours, monsieur?"

"Reine, you speak like a child. Am I a tyrant because I wish my promised wife to be above and beyond the gossip of a censorious babbling country town?"

"Your promised wife!" she repeats, still with those brightly angry eyes upon him. "I grow tired of hearing that. I can take care of my own honor, monsieur, believe me, although I should never be raised to that dignity."

"I never doubted it, but I do doubt your power to silence slanderous tongues, ready to put the most vicious construction on the most virtuous actions. Do you think the writer of that letter did not know his man? do you think any other words in human power to write could have struck home as these did? Reine, you are but a child in years—in the ignorance of innocence you think you can brave and defy the world. I tell you, no! it will crush and defame you without pity or mercy. Let me be your shield from it, as you have given me the right to be. Let me go to Mrs. Windsor and appeal to her to withdraw this injunction against your friend. I think I have influence enough for that, and if you must see him, let him come to the house openly and like a man, and in the face of all the world. Say the word and I will speak to her this very evening."

"Not for worlds!" cries Reine, passionately—"not for a

thousand worlds! What! after all her insults to the memory of my dear dead father, her taunts of our poverty and dependence, which she makes us feel every hour of our lives, I send you to plead with her for Léonce! Oh! I have indeed fallen low when I sit and listen even to such a proposal!"

"I meant it in good faith. Do you then prefer stealing out to meet him after dark in the grounds? Do you intend to persist in doing so?"

"And what if I do?"

"The what is very simple. I resign, at once, and forever, any slight claim I at present possess to influence your actions, and leave you altogether free to meet M. Léonce Durand when, and where, and how you please. Only, for your own sake, mademoiselle, let the trysting-hour be broad day, the trysting-place where all the world may see."

She looks up at him, deadly pale, and rises to her feet.

"Monsieur," she says, "I will never forgive you this last insult to the day of my death."

"There are many things you refuse to forgive me, Mademoiselle Reine," he answers; "one added can hardly signify. And I have no intention of offering you insult—nothing is further from my thoughts. If I did not care for you in a way and to an extent that makes me despise myself, do you think I would stand here warning you? Reine," he cries, fiercely, "cannot you see that I love you—love you so well that it maddens me to doubt you?"

"Oh! indeed, do you love me?" she says, with wondering scorn, still pale to lividness, and with quivering lips. "You guard your secret well. I could never have guessed it. Will you pardon me if, even after your tender declaration, I still doubt the fact?"

He, too, is startlingly pale, and there is certainly very little of lover's look or tone about him. And yet in his voice there is passionate pain, passionate longing, passionate re-

gret, and in his very intensity of anger and bitterness, perhaps deepest depths of love.

"Do you recall that night in the garden?" he says; "do you think, have you ever thought, I came to you with one idea of Mrs. Windsor or her money in my mind? You know better. But you said to me it was not Reine Landelle I desired but Mrs. Windsor's heiress. Perhaps I had given you some right to say that—if so, I now withdraw that right. I tell you if Mrs. Windsor cast you off penniless to-morrow, I would still ask you, and you alone, of all the women I know to be my wife. Does this give me no right to speak as I do? to ask you once more to give up Durand?"

"What does giving up Durand mean, monsieur?"

"It means meeting him no more clandestinely—it means telling me exactly what he is to you."

"I have already told—my aunt's step-son."

"Pshaw! You are usually brave and outspoken enough—don't prevaricate for so poor a creature. For he is unworthy of your regard, Reine; without knowing much of him, I know that. Trust me, dear," he takes her hands and looks earnestly into her eyes; "indeed I love you, I trust you, even while I seem to doubt you. Will you not trust me in turn?"

His sudden tenderness moves her. She trembles, shrinks, falters for the first time.

"I can—I do—I always have," she says brokenly; "it is not that. Oh! *Mon Dieu!* if it were my affair only! but it is not, and my lips are sealed. You must trust me blindfold or not at all. I will be the last to blame you. It will only be justice if you let me go."

There is a struggle, that she can almost see, and though she does not look at him, she hardly breathes while she waits. He drops her hands with a look of keenest disappointment.

"You will not trust me."

"I cannot."

"Will you tell me this at least—was he ever your lover?"
She hesitates and half averts her face.

"He was but a boy. He was not old enough to be any one's lover——"

"Still he was—you do not deny it."

"It meant nothing—it was years ago—it is all past and done with. It never meant anything. He was only a boy."

She may think so, and does, he can see, but Durand knows better.

"Answer me this at least: what brings him here?"

"I cannot."

"Not even this?"

"Not even this. My promise is given."

"A promise to Durand?"

"Monsieur, I implore you, do not ask me. I cannot tell. I can tell you nothing—now."

"Will the day ever come when you can?"

"Yes," she answers, with a weary sigh, "I think so, I hope so, but I do not know. Oh! monsieur, let us end this—I foresee nothing but trouble will come of it. My conduct looks suspicious. You are honestly trying to trust me, and you cannot. Let us make an end. It is not yet too late. Nothing is done that cannot be undone, and I am weary of doubts and quarrels. I will give you back your ring and your freedom, and then these secrets and hidden troubles of mine need disturb you no more. Monsieur Longworth, it would have been better for us all if you had never let us come here."

"I begin to think so," he answers, bitterly, "since this is to go on indefinitely. I had hoped—but what does it matter now. If you had cared for me——"

He stops with an impatient gesture, and moves away a few steps. Then he comes again and stands before her.

"You told me that night," he says, with an impetuosity

that is as unlike his usual manner as this deeply moved, passionate man, is unlike the phlegmatic Longworth Baymouth knows, "that you did not absolutely dislike me. How is it now? Have I compelled your dislike again?"

"No," she slowly answers, "you have not. I ought never to have disliked you, for you were good to us, M. Longworth, and meant well. But, oh! believe me, it would have been better if you had never let us come."

He goes on without heeding her last words:

"You own you do not dislike me. It seems a difficult thing to draw admissions from you, but will you admit also that it may be possible for you one day to care for me?"

"I think—it may be possible."

"No one else has any claim on you?"

"No one in all the world."

"Then I will wait," he says, earnestly, "and while I wait trust. Only be prudent. I will not hurry your decision; I will give you time. No, do not speak; I have more at stake than you give me credit for, and you are excited and annoyed now. I will wait for your decision, and I believe you will come to me one day soon, and of your own choice tell me all. Reine"—once again he takes her hands—"how shall I convince you you have no truer friend than I—no one in all the world you can more implicitly rely on? If I have been imperious, pardon me; if I felt less deeply I might be more collected and courteous; but my whole heart has gone out to you, and I cannot recall it if I would. Think this over, dear, and come to me and tell me your troubles. I can be Durand's friend as well, if he needs one, for your sake."

She withdraws her hands and covers her face, moved to her very heart.

"Oh! you are good, you are kind, you are generous," she says, in a stifled voice; "but it is all in vain. I have no right to speak; I am bound by promise, and I cannot betray trust."

"You can ask those who have bound you to free you. Surely you must see that this is right. You have proven sufficiently how thoroughly you can be silent and true. Prove to your plighted husband in turn how thoroughly you can confide in and trust him."

He stoops and touches her cheek with his lips; then, before she can speak or look up, is gone. The slight caress awakens within her a curious sort of tenderness; she stands and watches him out of sight—pain, regret, yearning in her eyes, and something stronger and deeper than either beneath. Then she sits down, white and unnerved, and looks blankly before her at the fast-darkening sea, and so when the summer night falls it finds her.

CHAPTER XXI.

"THE RIVALS."



RANK," says Miss Hariott, "answer me this. Did you or did you not, tell me on board the *Hesperia*, that you were only going to make a flying visit to Baymouth, for the sole purpose of building a yacht, and were then going virtuously and dutifully home to Georgia to see your mother and uncle? Did you, I say, or did you not?"

There is severity in Miss Hariott's tone, dignified reproof in Miss Hariott's eye. We say "eye" emphatically, for while she keeps one upon the culprit, the other is fixed in much distaste upon the little mud puddles in the road, through which she is daintily picking her way. The afternoon is delightful, breezy, crisp, clear, but the morning has been rainy, hence the mud.

"Did you, or did you not?" categorically repeats the lady, and Mr. Dexter laughs, lazily.

"On board the *Hesperia* was three whole months ago. How is a fellow to carry his mind back over such a period as that? I remember well enough your saying—(need I mention that every saying of yours is indelibly imprinted on this heart)—that you preferred Baymouth to Venice. If I prefer it to Georgia in August, who is to blame me? Not you, Miss Hariott; so smooth away that frown, and smile once more on the most abject of your adorers."

Miss Marie Landelle, sauntering by Frank's side, her pink-lined parasol casting a faint roseate glow over her pearl fair face, laughs faintly. These two are in front; behind come Mr. Longworth and Reine; Miss Hariott, in the center, skips over the puddles unsupported, sufficient unto herself. The whole party are bound for the Baymouth croquet ground, being members, one and all, of the Baymouth Croquet Club.

"This is all very fine," says Miss Hariott, with increased severity; "but as you have survived the Georgian heats for the past seventeen or eighteen years, don't you think the delicacy of your constitution might survive them once more? Last night I received a letter from your respected maternal parent, making four anxious epistles in all, imploring me in pathetic language to inform her truly, and at once, what it is that holds you spell-bound in this dull town. That letter, young sir, I shall answer before I sleep. Frank, I conjure you. What am I to say to your mother?"

A flush rises over Frank's sun-brown cheek—he casts a quick glance at his companion, but that lovely, serene face looks calm and more unconscious than the summer sky, the wonderful, yellow brown eyes gaze straight before into space and are as nearly expressionless as beautiful eyes can be. The young man sighs impatiently, and switches the heads off wayside daisies and dandelions with a quick, petulant motion. Every day the last state of this young Georgian grows worse than the first, every day he becomes a greater coward, in the very intensity of his passion. Every day he

grows more afraid to speak—the present is paradisiacal, she never seems to weary of his presence, but also, he can see with bitterness, she never seems to weary of his absence. The same sweet smile welcomes his coming, and speeds his going. If he went forever, some prescience tells him that sweet, placid smile would bid him farewell the same. If he speaks, and the dread fiat is No, he will be exiled from her presence, hope will die within him, the vulture of despair will gnaw at his vitals. And he is afraid to speak. To-day is good, even in its pain—so let to-day linger. But he knows, and she knows—and he knows she knows—what keeps him here; and Miss Hariott knows, and all Baymouth knows, and the whole world is welcome to know, what detains him here, a far too willing captive.

"You do not speak," goes on his stern, monitress, after a long pause, devoted to shirking puddles.

"My dearest Miss Hariott, have not your own fair lips taught me many a time and oft, that speech is silver and silence gold."

"Some speech may be silver; yours, young man, has the empty ring of hollow brass. Your silence is golden, I allow, in its rarity; but at present, will have brazen speech. What shall I say to Mrs. Dexter?"

"Oh, anything you please! Tell her not to fidget. The verb to fidget expresses my mother's normal state, though. Tell her I am all right, and being trained by you daily in the way I should go, and that when the yacht is launched my first trip shall be to see her. I'll take you along, if you like, Miss Hester—I promised that, did I not, on the Hesperia? Can mortal man promise more?"

"You will not go until the yacht is launched?"

"Can't, I give you my word! Have to be there every day—ought to be there at this moment. No end of a bore, building a yacht."

"Very well," says Miss Hariott, resignedly, "I may as

well get my spare bedroom ready; for the closing lines of your mother's letter, Frank, are these: 'If that wretched boy does not leave Baymouth this week I will be there next, to fetch him.'

Frank laughs.

"By George!" he says, "let her come by all means, Miss Hariott. I shall be uncommonly glad to see the poor little mater, and then I can take her home in the yacht. Miss Landelle, will you not come, too? You will enjoy the trip, I am sure."

"Are you?" responds Miss Landelle; "then I am not at all sure. Do you forget, Mr. Frank, that I am always sea-sick, that I cannot sail down the bay in the calmest weather without being ill? I should like the yacht and the company, but not the *mal de mer*. I think you must ask Reine instead."

"Mlle. Reine is asked of course—that goes without saying. But you"—Frank's voice drops almost to a whisper in the intensity of his eagerness—"Miss Landelle, surely you will not refuse me this pleasure. If you knew how I have looked forward to it, how all this summer——"

"We are late," interrupts Miss Landelle, with placid indifference: "see, they are playing. Had we not better walk on a little faster, Mr. Frank?"

The words are checked on his lips as they have been checked many a time before. Her calm unconsciousness is impenetrable, all his enthusiasm falls flat before it. He obeys in silence, and they leave the group behind, and hasten forward to the croquet-players.

At the gate a blear-eyed beggar sits crouched in the sun, holding out his hat and whining for alms. They pass him unheeded, only Reine stops abruptly, goes over and addresses him.

"What nonsense!" exclaims Longworth, impatiently; "it is that drunken old scoundrel Jackson, who got thirty

days for vagrancy and drunkenness, and has just served out his term. Now she is giving him money—what folly! I shall stop her—such a horrid old impostor——"

"You will let her alone," says Miss Hariott, softly, and looking with eyes full of tenderness at her little friend. "'For alms delivereth' from death, and the same is that which purgeth away sin and maketh to find mercy and life everlasting."

She goes. Longworth stands still and waits for Reine to come up. The momentary annoyance has passed from his face, something very different looks out of his eyes as they linger on the pair before him. It is a picture he never forgets—the cringing, red-eyed beggar, in his dirty rags, shrinking like a fowl lizard in the sun, and the girl with her soft, tender eyes and pitiful young face looking down upon him. But Mr. Longworth chooses to grumble when she rejoins him.

"Why do you let yourself be imposed upon by these people?" he says; "that is the most rascally old humbug in the town. He drinks, he steals, he beats his wife. He will go straight from here and get drunk on what you gave him. You should exercise discrimination in your charities, my dear child."

"Discrimination is not one of the cardinal virtues. I do not possess it, Mr. Longworth."

"But such a notorious old fraud——"

"He is old, and poor, and half blind," she says, impatiently, for long suffering is no more one of Reine's virtues than discrimination. "Let me alone, Mr. Longworth, you are not the keeper of my conscience. You never do wrong yourself, I know—how can you be expected to find mercy or pity for weaker mortals who do?"

They have reached the gate. Longworth is about to answer, but Mons. Durand comes up at the moment and joins them.

"I have been waiting for you, Petite," he says; "*bon jour*, Mr. Longworth. Are you the originator of this philanthropic scheme I hear them discussing, or is it Miss Hariott?"

"What philanthropic scheme?" inquires Longworth, shortly. "I have originated none."

"Then it must be the ever excellent Miss Hariott! A scheme to help these poor people, killed in the late mill explosion the other day——"

"As these poor people are dead and buried, Mons. Durand, I should imagine they were past helping by any scheme, however philanthropic," interrupts Longworth, grimly.

"Ah! pardon," Durand laughs, "it is that I express myself so badly. No, no, to help the families, the widow, and the orphan. I have left them discussing the project instead of playing the croquet, and waiting for you to come. Could they decide upon anything in this town without you, monsieur, I ask?"

He asks it with a shrug, and a smile at Reine, and Reine hastily interposes, for she sees an ominous knitting of Longworth's brows.

"I dare say Miss Hariott did originate it," she says; "she is one of the chief sufferers always by these dreadful things—she bleeds in heart and pocket alike. What is the present proposal, Léonce?"

"Proposal! Their name is legion. A fancy fair, says one lady, a charity ball says another, a concert says a third, with M. Durand for primo tenore, and Mlle. Reine for prima-donna. I say no, no, no, to all—let us have a play."

"I second the motion," says Miss Hariott when they have approached. "What do you say, Frank?"

"I say nothing," says Frank, sulkily.

Frank would die at the stake sooner than coincide with any idea of Durand's. Durand laughs in his airy fashion, and lays one white and shapely hand on Dexter's stalwart shoulder.

"François, mon ami——"

"My name's Frank," growls Mr. Dexter, still more sulkily.

"Écoute, mon chér Frank——"

"Speak English if you want to talk to me, Mister Durand."

He shakes off the hated hand, and moves away, closer to Miss Landelle's side.

"Listen, then, Frank, and all of you messieurs and mesdames. I say let us have a play—a play is my strong point. I will be stage manager. I will take all the labor of arrangements upon myself—you shall do nothing but accept your parts, and cover yourselves with distinction."

"Ah! cover ourselves with distinction!" repeats Miss Hariott with a groan, "what fiendish sarcasm is here?"

"What say you, Reine?" inquires Longworth, smiling, and Reine lifts two eyes dancing with delight. "You look as if you might like it."

"Monsieur, to perform in a play is the one unsatisfied ambition of my life!"

"And of mine," chimes in Miss Hariott; "let me strut my little hour upon the stage and I die happy."

"It ain't half a bad idea," says Mr. Beckwith, coming up, "it's new, and nice, and will pay. Fairs are bores, a ball this hot weather is not to be thought of, and picnics are played out. I say a play."

"A play! a play! my kingdom for a play!" cries little Mrs. Beckwith dancing up. "Mr. Durand you are a perfect angel!"

"Ah! madame," says M. Durand, and removes his hat, and lays his hand upon his heart; "as you are strong be merciful! Your lightest word of praise overpowers me."

Frank looks on and listens with a face of unmitigated disgust. What a little simpering fool that wife of Beckwith's is, he is charitably thinking, and what grinning, chattering monkeys Frenchmen invariably are!

"Let us form a committee of ways and means," says Beck

with, "and let us decide the matter at once. Here's a cool place under these trees—let us sit down. Now then, mon sieur, you're the leader and chief of this project—what's the play to begin with?"

A confusion of tongues immediately ensues.

"The Lady of Lyons," cries shrilly Mrs. Beckwith; "I will play Pauline and M. Durand the fascinating Claude Melnotte."

"Did ever a collection of amateur noodles murder a good drama, I wonder, without beginning with 'The Lady of Lyons?'" comments Mr. Dexter, still disgusted, to Miss Marie.

Miss Marie smiles, reposes under her pink parasol, listens and takes no part in the discussion. Some one proposes "Macbeth," with Mr. O'Sullivan as the Thane of Cawdor, and Miss Hariott as the tremendous heroine. This is overruled with much laughter. "Hamlet" is ambitiously asked for next by Mr. Beckwith; Durand can play Hamlet, Mr. B. opines, he rather looks like that sort of thing, and he might throw a little originality into the performance by singing a French comic song, say in the grave-digging scene, or just before the ghost enters. He, Mr. Beckwith, thinks he might distinguish himself as the Ghost. This too meets with objection. Then they discuss the "School for Scandal," but here Mr. Beckwith takes high moral ground. The "School for Scandal" isn't proper, by George, and he isn't going in for what is not strictly virtuous and correct. No married man ought to countenance such a rascal as Joseph Surface, and Charles was not much better. Saw it played once in Boston, and was sorry he took Mrs. B. The man who wrote it ought to be ashamed of himself.

"Speaking of the School for Scandal, what do you say to Sheridan's other comedy 'The Rivals,'" inquires Durand; "it is not beyond ordinary amateur histrionic efforts, and Mr. Beckwith's moral scruples do no apply. You have all seen 'The Rivals,' I suppose?"

Yes, all had seen "The Rivals"—it would do capitally. "Let me see," says Durand, frowning reflectively; "there are enough of us, I think. You can all learn your parts this week, next Monday we can have our first rehearsal, and the Monday night following shall be *the* night, big with fate. We will have rehearsal every morning at ten. M. Longworth, you will make an excellent Captain Absolute. Mr. Dexter, please consider yourself Captain Absolute's father, the stormy Sir Anthony. Reine, look upon yourself from this hour as the ever charming Mees Lydia Languish. Madame Sheldon, whom I regret not to see here, will make a most admirable Lucy."

"If Mrs. Sheldon takes any part," says Reine, slowly and decidedly, "I decline to play."

Without a moment's warning this bomb-shell explodes in the midst of the party. Everybody is stricken mute, everybody stares. Longworth turns and looks at her keenly, Miss Hariott seems astonished, Marie opens her soft, sleepy eyes, Durand alone takes it coolly.

"Ah! well," he says, gayly, "a lady's caprice is a thing to be respected, not questioned. We omit the so charming Madame Sheldon, from our corps dramatique. Madame Beckwith, will you condescend to accept the character of the vivacious and sprightly Lucy?"

"Is it a good part?" inquires Mrs. Beckwith, not best pleased at the preference given Mrs. Sheldon. "Have I considerable to say? Can I wear pretty dresses?"

"One of the principal parts, and you can dress as bewitchingly as you please."

"Lucy's only a waiting-maid, my dear, and drops out of sight altogether about the second act," chuckles Mr. Beckwith. "You'll have to wear a cap and a duster, a white apron with pockets, and a dress down to your ankles. Chambermaids always dress like that on the stage."

"But these nice proprieties need not be observed in ama-

teurs," interposes Miss Hariott, soothingly. "Lucy's is a delightful part, and you may get up the most coquettish little costume imaginable. Nothing could suit you better. M. Durand, if you do not cast me for Mrs. Malaprop I will never forgive you."

"Mees Hariott, consider yourself Mrs. Malaprop, I foresee you will electrify us in that role. Marie," he turns abruptly, an instantaneous change in tone and face. "You know the play well—will you perform Julia to my Faulkland?"

"I will spoil the performance. I have no talent whatever. Select some one else," she answers, with a shrug.

"Pardon. Do you forget I have seen you in private theatricals before? Yes, in that very character. As a favor to me—I do not often ask favors—play Julia."

There is a curious silence. Frank Dexter scowls blackly, Reine watches her sister with sudden eagerness, Durand never moves his glance from her face, Marie meets that glance full, a sort of hard defiance in her handsome eyes.

"You need not put it in that earnest way, Monsieur Durand. If you, as manager and proprietor, wish it, and no one else objects, I am quite willing to oblige."

"A thousand thanks! You will play Julia?"

"I will make the attempt."

"And you are the jealous lover! You select a thankless role, M. Durand," observes Longworth.

"It is one he can perform, too, I'll be bound," says Mr. Beckwith. "Dark-complexioned men, with black eyes and mustaches, always make first-rate jealous lovers or first murderers. You don't intend to leave me out in the cold, I hope, a looker-on in Vienna?"

"By no means. We want a Bob Acres. You will be Bob Acres."

"Capital, faith!" says Mr. O'Sullivan, who has been lounging in the outskirts; "he was made for the character. Are you going to do nothing for me, Mr. Stage Manager?"

"Need you ask? There is Sir Lucius O'Trigger. Are you not the very man we want?"

"Better and better. Upon me life, if I'm the success I think I'll be, in this, my début, I'll retire from pen, ink, and paper forever—sure literature's a pernicious profession, all the world knows—and take to genteel light comedy. 'Ah! me little friend,'" says Mr. O'Sullivan, turning to Beckwith, and quoting from the part assigned him, "'if we had Blunderbuss Hall here, I could show you a range of ancestry in the O'Trigger line, every one of whom had killed his man. For though the mansion house and dirty acres have slipped through my fingers, thank Heaven! our honor and the family pictures are as fresh as ever.' I'm to fight a duel with somebody, I forget who."

"You will discover to-morrow," says Durand. "Every one is satisfied with his or her rôle, I hope. I do not think we can do better."

But where were ever private theatricals in which the performers were satisfied with their parts? Mr. Dexter, for instance, still out of humor, grumbles audibly with the part assigned him. Sir Anthony Absolute, a blustering old heavy father, stumping ridiculously about the stage, and making an elderly ass of himself—a pretty part to assign him! He feels sure he would shine as Faulkland, in a suit of black velvet; but no—Durand, in his beastly selfishness, must keep that to himself, for the sole purpose of making love to Marie.

Mrs. Beckwith would have preferred Lydia Languish to Lucy. Marie looks bored by the whole business. Miss Hariott, alone brisk and satisfied, announces her intention of returning instantly home, and bearing Reine with her, to begin their studies without a second's loss of time.

"What an exceedingly versatile gentleman M. Durand happens to be," she observes on the way; "he seems to know a little of everything under the sun. Was he ever an actor, Little Queen?"

"He is an opera singer," Reine says, in a low voice.

"He sings charmingly, I allow, and although I do not overmuch like M. Durand, it is impossible to really dislike any one with such a voice. What a good gift it is."

"You say you do not like him?" Reine repeats. "Why, madame?"

"How can I tell? He is handsome, he is agreeable, he is polite, but still, 'I do not love you, Dr. Fell;' it is that sort of unreasonable Dr. Fell feeling, I know some one else who does not like him either, Petite Reine."

"You mean Mr. Dexter?"

"No, my dear, I don't. I mean Mr. Longworth."

"And yet—poor Léonce—what has he done that any of you should dislike him?"

"Have you never disliked and distrusted any one, Petite, without why or wherefore? How long does he remain in Baymouth?"

"I do not know. Until the end of September, I believe."

"Reine," says Miss Hariott, abruptly, "when are you going to be married?"

"Married! *Mon Dieu!*" exclaims Reine reddening and laughing nervously. "What a startling question."

"Why startling? You are engaged, are you not? And marriage is the customary climax of engagement."

"Not always."

"Petite, what do you mean? I can see, I have seen for some time that there is something between you and Laurence that is not as it should be. Dear, I was so glad when I heard he had chosen you, so glad my Little Queen was to be his wife."

"Yes," Reine says, smiling, but with a little quiver of the voice, "and not jealous at all?"

"I shall be sorry to lose my friend," replies Miss Hariott, steadily, "and a man is lost as a friend who marries. But I

knew he would marry some time, and I was glad he chose you—glad, thankful, happy."

"Yes," Reine murmurs, softly, again, "it was best."

"You had vowed never to like him," goes on Miss Hariott, with a smile; "you tried hard to make yourself believe you did not like him; but, oh! child, I saw through it all, and I read your heart better than you read it yourself, and I know you care for him strongly, truly, deeply, and well."

The dark face droops guiltily, deep red burning on either cheek.

"And he gave you his whole heart. Reine, do you know what a good gift the love of a true man is? I saw all from the first; I saw, too, that you both were proud and perverse, and misunderstood, and would not show what you felt. Still, this sort of thing rights itself in time if let alone, and every thing was beginning to go on as I wished, when lo! this young Durand comes on the carpet and spoils all."

"How?" asked Reine, defiantly. "M. Durand has nothing to do with it. Is he not my brother?"

"I don't believe in that sort of brother," retorts Miss Hariott, cynically, "unless he is fifty and humpbacked. Léonce Durand has one of the most beautiful faces any male creature ever wore; your regard for him is plain for all the world to see; and Laurence is only man, and very mortal, my dear, and he is jealous, and everything is going wrong."

"He has no right to be jealous," Reine flashes out. "I have told him what Léonce and I are to each other. He has no right to think of me as he does."

"My dear, right has nothing to do with it. When love begins to weigh things, and balance the right and the wrong, it ceases to be love. It is the most supremely unwise and unreasoning passion on earth. It makes the wise man a madman, the miser a spendthrift, the *savant* a simpleton. He is jealous unreasonably, if you like, so is Frank Dexter with still less reason; and until Durand goes, so both will remain.

Take my advice, Reine, and send your little French brother away."

"No!" cries Reine. "I am not my brother's keeper. He shall stay as long as he pleases. With Mr Longworth's doubts, and fears, and fancies I have nothing to do. If he chooses to suspect me unjustly, let him. I will not lift a finger to set him right."

"Reine, take care! You will regret this."

"Very likely—I regret many things."

"You do not know him as I do. He will bear until he thinks endurance ceases to be a virtue, and then——"

"Well, madame, and then——?" The dark head lifts haughtily.

"All will end between you, and you will be the one to suffer most. It is always the woman who suffers most."

"Do you suppose M. Longworth could suffer for the loss or gain of any woman?" the girl says, scornfully. "If so, do him justice—he is quite above any such weakness. For the rest, I say, and say again, if he chooses to suspect me unjustly, let him. I will not try to set him right. If he cannot trust me, then the sooner he gives me up the better."

"Willful!" says Miss Hariott, shaking her head; "headstrong both of you, and proud as Lucifer. You are well matched—either of you would die before you would yield an inch."

"I have nothing to yield. I do not suspect him. I am not jealous."

"My little Norman girl, we weaker vessels must yield or break. If I did not like you and Laurence both so well, I would wash my hands of your antematrimonial squabbles, like a sensible maiden lady, who has had the wisdom to steer clear of them herself; but I do like you, and cannot give you up, that is the truth. Here we are—come in and stay the evening. Larry shall take you home."

Reine remains willingly enough, and they peruse "The

Rivals," and take tea together in the pretty room, with the evening sunshine glinting on the china, and the flowers in the center of the table. Later, Longworth comes, and Reine sings for them, while they sit as usual in the twilight and talk. The moments are charmed; ten comes far too soon, and Reine looks round the pleasant room with regret as she rises to go.

"What a pretty house this is," she says. "I wish I lived with you, Mees Hariott, and we could grow old gracefully together, drinking tea, reading books, singing songs."

"Mr. Longworth," says Miss Hariott, "what do you think of the programme? Are you willing? Because nothing would please me better, and I would guard Petite like a fiery dragon from the Scylla and Charybdis of man and matrimony. What do you say?"

Longworth laughs.

"Nothing to you. I shall endeavor to change mademoiselle's opinion on the way home. I promise to provide her with tea *ad nauseam*, books, and songs *ad libitum*, if she will consent to live with me instead of you."

"When?"

"Ah! when? Who knows? The when is for Reine. In the vague and indefinite future. But don't you go and poison her mind with your baleful anti-matrimonial doctrines, confirmed vestal that you are! Petite, I never told you," he turns to her, his eyes laughing, "that I once asked Miss Hariott to marry me."

"No," says Reine, coolly, "but she has."

"Did she tell you also that she refused me?"

"I beg your pardon," interposes Miss Hariott, "I never refused you. You did not press for an answer, and I simply reserved my decision. I still reserve it, and some day when you stand the bridegroom of Another, at the very altar, I may stride forward an awful Nemesis and forbid the *Ja*. It is my right."

"M. Longworth should be used to rejection by this time," says Mlle. Reine; "he appears to have been singularly unfortunate in his affairs of the heart. Repeated blows, however, harden substances already hard by nature, do they not?"

"Ah! You know all about it, I see. Yes, I have been most unfortunate in the past; let us hope the future will make amends."

"Does not the present?" inquires Miss Hariott.

"Not satisfactorily. Good-night, fair hostess. Don't let the small hours find you studying the wit and wisdom of Mrs. Malaprop."

They go home through the sweet smelling, faint warm darkness of the August night, meeting few, speaking little, supremely content in their hidden hearts, to be together and alone.

"Reine," he says, gently, "what did you mean by refusing to play if Mrs. Sheldon was to be one of us?"

"Need you ask?" she answers, calmly. "Léonce tore up his letter in his room, set fire to the fragments and threw them in the grate. One portion escaped and was found. Who think you, in that house, would take the trouble to write an anonymous letter, and inclose it? Mrs. Sheldon was once your affianced. There are those who say she aspires to the position still. Do you think that letter was the work of a servant?"

Longworth answers nothing; he has been thinking the matter over himself. But when the subject is renewed by Mrs. Sheldon herself, as she stands alone with him next day, he speaks.

"You are engaged to Miss Reine Landelle, Laurence," she says, with emotion, and her handkerchief to her eyes; "she can do nothing wrong in your regard, I know, but I thought at least you were my friend—old times might surely have made you that. I never—no, I never thought you would stand quietly by and hear me insulted."

Longworth looks at her cynically, unmoved by the falling tears.

"I would leave old times out of the question if I were you, Totty," he answers. "As for Mlle. Reine, what would you have? I couldn't knock her down. Freedom of speech is a lady's prerogative, and besides, I am not sure that I do not rather admire her spirit."

"Laurence! Admire her for insulting me! Oh! this is cruel indeed!"

"Don't cry, Mrs. Sheldon—there are few ladies whose beauty is improved by tears. Shall I really tell you why she spoke as she did?"

"If you please. If you know."

"I know. Up stairs, in his room, one day last week, Monsieur Durand tore up and burned the fragments of a letter. One fragment escaped, and was picked up by some one in this house—was inclosed in a vile, anonymous letter and sent to me. The letter was in a woman's hand—disguised. I showed it to Mlle. Reine Landelle, and she formed her own surmise as to the writer. I have no more to say; only, in my own defense, I shall burn any further nameless communications. Time to start for the office, I see. Good-morning, Laura."

CHAPTER XXII.

"THE RIVALS"—ON THE STAGE AND OFF.



THROUGH the pleasant afternoon, Mr. Longworth of the *Phoenix* saunters up to make a call upon his friend Miss Hariott. It is as well to say Miss Hariott, although he is pretty certain to find Mlle. Reine Landelle there, as well. The windows of the little cottage stand open, and a smile breaks over his face as he draws near, for

he can plainly hear Mrs. Malaprop and Miss Languish vehemently gabbling their parts. He leans his folded arms on the window-sill and looks in at the two actresses who, in the spirit of true artistes, pay no heed to their audience but go on.

"There, Sir Anthony!" exclaims Mrs. Malaprop, pointing a derisive finger at her fair companion, "there stands the deliberate simpleton who wants to disgrace her family, and lavish herself on a fellow not worth a shilling!"

(Reine—as Lydia Languish.)—"Madame, I thought you once——"

(Mrs. Malaprop.)—"You thought, miss! I don't know what business you have to think at all! thought does not become a young woman. But the point we would request of you is, that you will promise to forget this fellow—to illiterate him, I say, from your memory."

Longworth glances at Reine, his smile fading. He is thinking of Durand—the words seem to apply. Perhaps Reine is also, for the pathos of her tone is very real as she answers:

"Ah! madame, our memories are independent of our wills. It is not so easy to forget."

(Mrs. M.)—"But I say it is, miss! there is nothing on earth so easy as to forget, if a person chooses to set about it. I'm sure I have as much forgot your poor dear uncle as if he had never existed, and I thought it my duty so to do, and let me tell you, Lydia, these violent memories don't become a young woman."

Here there is some gentle applause from the window. Miss Harcourt delivers this speech as if she meant it.

"Madame," says Lydia, still pathetically, "what crime have I committed to be treated thus?"

"Will you please to do as you are bid?" demands Mrs. Malaprop, severely. "Will you take a husband of your friend's choosing?"

"Madame," responds Lydia, emphatically, and casts a de-

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stant glance at the window, "I must tell you plainly that had I no preference for any one else, the choice you have made would be my aversion!"

"And what business have you, miss!" cries Mrs. Malaprop, in a fine fury, "with preference and aversion? They don't become a young woman; and you ought to know that as both always wear off, 'tis safest in matrimony to begin with a little aversion."

"Larry," says the speaker, descending from the heights of Malaprop, to be Miss Hariott once more, "come in, if you want to. I can't do myself justice with you looking on, and, besides, Lydia doesn't half know her lines. Take your book, miss, and go study. Let me tell you it does not become a young woman to only half know her lesson."

Reine laughs, picks up her book, and disappears. Longworth enters and takes his customary chair.

"Where is Mrs. Dexter?" he asks.

For two days before Mrs. Dexter arrived in Baymouth, as per promise, and is Miss Hariott's guest.

"Gone to call upon Mrs. Windsor. Like the best and most obedient of little mothers, she has fallen in love with Marie because her big boy has told her to do so. She sings her praises until I grow idiotic, listening. She is the prettiest creature the sun shines on—so gentle, so sweet, so affectionate, and as Mrs. Windsor's heiress, a fitting match even for Longworth's heir. "Laurence," she lays down the work she has taken up, and looks at him earnestly, "I wonder if that unfathomable girl means to marry poor Frank?"

"Can she do better?"

"No-o. And she doesn't seem the kind to have had prior attachments. I think if the lovely Marie were vivisected her heart might be put in a filbert-shell. Reine, self-willed, perverse, hot-tempered, is worth a thousand of her. She has a heart of gold for him who is able to win it."

"Ah! but the winning is such uncommonly up-hill work,"

says Longwerth, lazily, but with an amused look in his eyes, "and the question that naturally presents itself to an inquiring mind, is: is the game worth the candle?"

"The man who could ask such a question," begins Miss Hariott vehemently. Then she stops and takes up her work. "I won't say another word!" she exclaims. "You are ready to sit there and abuse her for the next hour for the pleasure of hearing me contradict you! I won't do it!"

Longwerth laughs, and silence falls. Outside the faint sea-breeze stirs among the September flowers, bees boom in "wave-swung lilies and wind-swung roses," the sharp crack of the grasshopper pierces the hot, dry grass.

Reine appears to have totally vanished. The day is *the* day so long expected, so much talked of, and to-night Baymouth is to be electrified by the grand amateur performance of "The Rivals." For the last ten days dressmakers have been busy, costumes have been sent for, rehearsals have been going on. A crowded house is expected; a very little goes a long way in Baymouth. There are daily rehearsals, and daily squabbles, despair and frenzy on the part of Monsieur Durand, chronic sulkiness on the part of the performers. The manager's task is a Herculean one, the drilling of these raw recruits a formidable and thankless undertaking, but after a fashion he accomplishes it. Among the refractory corps, Frank Dexter is perhaps the most incorrigible, the most maddeningly pig-headed. Frank, who takes umbrage at the manager's most innocent remarks, who stands in the wings and scowls like a demon, daily, during the love passages between Faulkland and his insipid Julia. And perhaps since the character was first performed it was never rendered so utterly flat, stale, and vapid as in the hands of Miss Marie Landelle. Faulkland may rave, may glare, may spout his gloomy speeches as impassionedly as mortal man may, he awakens no answering response in that cool bogom. Miss Landelle, her radiant hair falling like a glory about her, her beautiful

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eyes fixed upon him, repeats her lines without falter or mistake, no more emotion in face or voice than if she were a talking doll. And it is a noticeable fact that except when they address each other in character, they seldom address each other at all. M. Durand is scrupulously polite to mademoiselle, his cousin; he has a trick of furtively watching her, too, which Frank sees with silent rage. A sort of restraint is growing up between him and Reine also, which Mr. Longworth sees, and of which he highly approves. The manner of this last gentleman is that of a duelist on guard, coldly courteous, but ever watchful and suspicious. Frank, on the contrary, makes open war, rebels boldly, and in sight of all, against the self-constituted authority of the stage-manager.

"Frank, *mon cher*," will say M. Durand, in his bright eager way, "don't stand in that rigid and unnatural attitude. Stand at ease. Don't use your legs and arms as if they belonged to some one else, and were made of glass, and you were afraid the slightest movement might break them."

"Mr. Durand," Frank replies with elaborate politeness, "will it suit your convenience if I have a few of my limbs amputated? My legs and arms appear to have ruined your peace of mind ever since this performance began. I will cheerfully submit to the operation sooner than that they should continue to cause you the perpetual suffering they seem to do!" Or it will be this:

"M. Dexter," Durand will say, pathos in his voice, despair in his face, "*don't* stand with the back of your head to the audience. I beg of you, I entreat of you, turn a better face to the house."

"I haven't got any better face," returns M. Dexter, with sudden smothered fury; "if the house doesn't like my face, the house needn't look at it. What do I want standing staring at your audience, and be hanged to them, like a gaby, when I've got nothing to say to them!"

But the evening is here, and a great throng with it. Bay.

mouth musters well to enjoy the blunders and breakdowns of the amateurs. At eight every seat is filled, and the orchestra is in full blast—silent expectations of fun to come fills the house. Behind the scenes dire confusion and flutter obtain, people with painted faces and wigged heads rush frantically to and fro, little yellow-covered books in their hands, gabbling idiotically. M. Durand, in the dress of the somber Faulkland, is ubiquitous, gesticulating, imploring, beseeching, trying madly to evoke order out of chaos. In the midst of the confusion, worse confounded, up goes the curtain, and on go Fag and the Coachman!

And here the fun-expectant audience are not disappointed. Memory and voice forsake these two poor players instantaneously, at sight of that sea of eager faces, and twinkling eyes. In vain the prompter roars in a husky and frantic whisper, painfully audible to all present but the two unfortunates for whom it is intended. "Come off!" at last despairingly is the cry, and Fag and the Coachman go off wiser and sadder men. The opening scene closes in humiliating and abject defeat, and Baymouth titters audibly and feels that it is getting its money's worth.

The next is the room of Miss Lydia Languish—Miss L. L., in delicate pink silk, her profuse dark hair coiled about her small, shapely head, "discovered" reclining in an easy chair, and Lucy, the maid, in the most coquettish of dresses, and most undaunted of voices, comes briskly forward, and speaks:

"Indeed, ma'am, I've traversed half the town in search of it. I don't believe there's a circulating library in Bath I ha'n't been at."

The audience feel they are to be cheated in this scene—it is going to "go off." Reine speaks, and her rich, full voice is perfectly distinct to all. Mrs. Beckwith, as the sprightly Lucy, covers herself with renown. Mlle. Reine knows her lines, and says them with spirit and effect. Presently enters Marie

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as Julia, beautifully dressed, and at sight of that angelic face there breaks forth a hearty and simultaneous round of applause, that is as honest and high a compliment to her rare loveliness as Marie Landelle has ever received. A faint flush rises to her cheek, a faint, pleased smile to her lips, as she ever so slightly acknowledges that surprised tribute. But her beauty is the best of her, the audience quickly find; her manner is listless, her voice low, her speeches long; and a well-disposed gamin, leaning over the gallery, kindly urges her at last to, "Speak up, miss; don't be ashamed of yourself."

Mrs. Malaprop and Sir Anthony Absolute appear—Sir Anthony very tottering as to his knees, very deeply rouged as to his face, but deficient as to his memory, indifferent as to his voice, and stonily rigid as to every movement. A smile reappears on the face of Baymouth—Mr. Frank Dexter, as the irascible Sir Anthony, is going to give it its money's worth once more. Mrs. Malaprop, however, goes to the other extreme; her strong gray eyes survey Baymouth unflinchingly, and she immediately casts into the shade all who have appeared before her, the moment she opens her lips.

In the next act Mr. Longworth, in the scarlet coat and gold trimmings of the dashing and deceiving Captain Absolute, appears, and Mr. Longworth is cool and collected, is master of both voice and memory, and Baymouth begins to feel it has really gone to the theater, and is assisting at a play. This impression is confirmed when Léonce Durand, darkly handsome, deeply jealous in most becoming black velvet, strides forward to the footlights. Bob Acres, in the hands of Mr. Beckwith, is the dreariest of failures; but Sir Lucius O'Trigger comes in, is received with rapture, speaks up like a man, and from this moment the performance proceeds with renewed life. Even Sir Anthony forgets for a moment the depressing superfluity of legs and arms he has

been laboring under, and stamps up and down, memory and voice restored.

There can be no doubt, however, well as Longworth, O'Sullivan, and Miss Hariott acquit themselves, that Durand is pre-eminently the star of the night. There is a real and passionate earnestness in his morbid jealousy and torturing love that Baymouth has not expected, and that holds it silent and surprised.

"Gad you know," as Mr. Beckwith remarks at the wings, "he goes at it as though he had never done anything else but make love to, and be jealous of, Miss Marie. By George, you know, he does it as if he meant it."

When the fifth act opens with the impassioned scene between the lovers—Julia's renunciation of him and Faulkland's despair—there is something almost painful in the realism, the intensity with which Durand goes through it. Marie, too, for the first time draws up her tall, slender figure, her eyes kindle, she extends one hand, her voice rises, her gaze transfixes him—in that gaze anger, scorn, contempt.

"But one word more!" she says, and her voice rings clearly, sternly out, as though that word were not acting, but inexorable reality. "As once my faith has been given you, I will never barter it with another. I shall pray for your happiness, and the dearest blessing I can ask of Heaven to send you, will be to charm you from that unhappy temper which alone has prevented the performance of our solemn engagement. And let it not be your least regret that it has lost you the love of one who would have followed you in beggary throughout the world!"

She goes with a sweep of the hand, and something in her face that is not acting. Faulkland's burst of despair thrills every heart. "She is gone, and forever! Oh! fool, dolt, barbarian!"

Baymouth stares—this is not the sort of thing they paid seventy-five cents to see. An injured sense comes upon

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"THE RIVALS"—ON THE STAGE AND OFF. 313

them of having been swindled—where does the laugh they bargained for come in here? But the duel scene begins, and Bob Acres is funnier than ever was Bob Acres before, without intending it in the least, and Sir Anthony is suddenly sulky, and doesn't care whether he blunders or not, and Baymouth is in a broad grin once more when the curtain falls.

The Rivals ends. Altogether it has not been such bad fun Baymouth decides, if that Frenchman had not played so absurdly well. A storm of applause greets the finish—Mrs. Malaprop is called for, Captain Absolute is called for, and when he appears holding his father by the hand, there is some danger of the roof coming off. The young ladies are called for, but decline to come. Sir Lucius O'Trigger is called for vociferously, and to him there is flung a bouquet of size and beauty. With emotion and gratitude beaming from every feature, Mr. O'Sullivan stoops to pick it up, when lo! it slowly but surely evades his grasp, and ascends majestically to the regions whence it came. A blank stare from the great Sir Lucius, a roar from the audience, and then the curtain is down. Baymouth is departing, and the amateur performance is at an end.

The conclusion of the entertainment is to be celebrated by a little supper at Miss Hariott's. Thither the whole company, in high good humor (with one exception), repair. Need it be said that exception is Mr. Dexter, who off the stage seems to exchange the bluff and blustering character of Sir Anthony for the moodily misanthropical one of Faulkland. The real Faulkland is in the wildest of wild high spirits, the excitement of the evening seems to have flown to his head like champagne. Perhaps it is that he still fancies himself performing the rôle of Marie Landelle's lover, that makes him keep so persistently by her side, makes him talk to her so incessantly, and laugh so feverishly and often. Reine watches him, that terror Longworth has seen there before rising in her eyes. Longworth watches her, she watches

Durand, Frank watches Marie—Marie whose face looks cold, and pale, and fixed almost as marble in its chill displeasure. All through the supper Durand's spirits keep at fever heat. He tells stories and leads the laugh, pays voluble compliments to all the ladies upon their acting, but chiefly to Marie.

"She cast me off with withering scorn, as if it were reality, not acting, did she not. Frank, *très cher*?" he cries, gayly. "I stand renounced and rejected forever."

"You bear it well, at least," says Frank, coldly. He is looking with angry contempt at his rival, but he sees, too, the fiery flash of Reine's dark eyes across the table. For Marie, who is next him, she turns deliberately to Longworth, her neighbor on the left, and looks at Durand no more.

Supper ends—all rise and disperse through the rooms, for Miss Hariott has thrown open every apartment. A moment later Longworth sees Reine approach, say a few words to Durand, sees him listen attentively, nod silently, and presently disappear altogether. Mrs. Beckwith flutters up, addresses him, claims his attention, and five minutes latter, when he looks again, Reine too is gone.

"Where is Durand?" he inquires carelessly of his hostess. "Gone out to indulge in a cigar," she answers; "finds in doors too close. He has found something to upset him, certainly; he is altogether unlike himself to-night."

"Still the smoking idea is a good one. The house is close. I think I will step out and blow a cloud myself."

He goes. The night is dark, starless, and sultry for September; the little rooms are unpleasantly heated. He is vaguely uneasy; the sense of something being wrong and secret between Durand and these sisters is upon him more strongly than ever. There is a meaning under the manner of all three that irritates and baffles him. Why has Reine made him quit the house and go home? Is she afraid of some reckless disclosure? And where is Reine? Has she

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gone with him? He lights his cigar with a savage feeling upon him of being plotted against and tricked, and stands leaning upon the porch, hidden in the obscurity of the night. Presently as he stands motionless he sees two figures approaching from the opposite end of the walk. His sight is keen; it is a man and a woman—it is Durand and Reine, and it is Reine who is speaking in a vehement, passionately angry undertone. In the stillness he hears every word.

"I have told you again and again, and yet again, Léonce, that this rashness will be fatal—you will ruin us all. Already people look at us with suspicion and curiosity, to-night more than ever. I entreat you, I implore you, to go before it is too late."

"I will not go," he answers, doggedly. "I had the right to come, I have the right to stay. What care I for people's looks or suspicions? Let the worst come if it will; nothing *can* be worse than leaving my wife to be made love to by another man. You may preach prudence, but I am not a stock or a stone. I can't endure this much longer. There are times, I tell you, when I am almost mad. The end will be that I will go to Madame Windsor and tell her all."

"Then hear me!" Reine cries, still in that passionate undertone, "on the day you do, I give you up forever! I will never forgive you, nor see you, I swear it, as long as I live. What! are you a coward and a traitor, as well as—"

"Go on," Durand says, with a jeering laugh.

"Was it not enough," she vehemently retorts, but always in that passionate whisper, "to entrap a girl who loved you, who trusted you, into a secret marriage, but you must break your solemn promise and come here and blight her every prospect in life? Léonce! Léonce!" she cries, and all at once the hot anger dies out, and her voice breaks into a sob. "You must indeed be mad."

They pass on. Durand lingers for a moment in the porch, holding both her hands and speaking earnestly. Then he

bends and kisses her, and both pass out of sight and hearing into the house.

For Longworth—he stands stunned; it is no figure of speech—literally and absolutely stunned. He takes off his hat, a sort of giddiness upon him for a moment. His wife! Durand's wife! The words keep beating themselves out in his brain over, and over, and over. This, then, is the secret at last.

He does not know how long he stands. He hears the company breaking up, but he does not stir; he hears himself inquired for, but it never occurs to him to move. Presently they come flocking out, and there is a confusion of tongues, many voices speaking at once, and wondering where he can be. The angle of the porch screens him completely, his cigar has gone out and does not betray him. He can distinguish the voice of Reine, then Marie speaks, then Frank, then Durand.

"He only stepped out to smoke a cigar," says Miss Hariott, perplexedly, "the earth cannot have opened and swallowed him, can it?"

"You haven't an old oak chest anywhere about, have you?" says little Mrs. Beckwith, laughing. "If so, open it before you go to bed and you will find his mouldering remains."

"Shouldn't wonder if he got tired of us all and went home promiscuously," says Mrs. Beckwith's lord and master. "Odd fellow Longworth, played uncommon well to-night. Went down on his knees to you, Ma'amselle Reine, as if he was used to it, bless you, and liked it. Well, good-night—good-morning rather, Miss Hariott, for there goes two o' clock. Come, my dear."

They go down to the gate and disappear with many good-nights, many wondering comments where Mr. Longworth can be. As Miss Hariott returns he steps out of his concealment, and follows her into the house. She turns round and recoils from him with a scream.

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"Laurence ! Good Heaven ! What is the matter ?"

"What do you see the matter ?" he says, in a voice that does not sound like Longworth's.

"Look at yourself," she answers, and he glances at a mirror opposite. His face is deadly white.

"Ah ! pale, am I ?"

"Pale ! You are ghastly. What in Heaven's name has happened ?"

"Nothing has happened. I think I had a touch of vertigo, out there—heat probably. I did not join the people, but I could not go without saying good-night."

"Drink this," she says, and hands him a glass of wine. Her hand shakes as she offers it ; something *has* happened, something strange and out of the common she feels.

He takes it with a smile.

"I always obey you, I think," he says. "You are the best and truest of friends. Good-night."

He lays down the glass, finds his hat, and before she can speak is gone.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BY THE GARDEN WALL.



OTHEK," says Frank Dexter, "I want to ask a favor."

It is the morning following the theatricals, and Mr. Dexter has made the earliest of morning calls upon his mother. They have the little sunshiny parlor all to themselves. Mrs. Dexter occupies a rocking-chair and is swaying to and fro, a placid smile on her face as she watches her tall son. That young gentleman roams restlessly about, picking up books and throwing them away, sitting down suddenly and getting up abruptly. Something, beyond doubt, is prey-

ing on Mr. Dexter's mind. The very tiniest of tiny matrons is Mrs. Dexter, and proportionably proud of her six-foot son—a gentle little soul more used to asking than granting favors, more accustomed to obeying than being obeyed. One of the docile sort of little women who always mind their men folks, whether as fathers, husbands, or sons, and who do as they are bidden, like good grown-up children, all their lives.

"Yes, Franky dear," says Mrs. Dexter, folding two mites of hands on her lap; "only please sit down, dear. You make me nervous, fidgeting about so. 'What is it?'"

"You are going to Boston, this afternoon, mother?"

"Yes, dear. As I return to Georgia so soon, I must go to Boston at once, if I go at all. I really must go, you know, dear, having so many friends there, and coming North so seldom. And then I have *such* a quantity of shopping."

"How long do you propose staying in Boston?"

"Well, two or three days, perhaps a week. Certainly not longer. Your poor dear uncle hates being left alone, and you have annoyed him very much, Franky dear, by your prolonged absence this summer. He says there is no gratitude or natural feeling left in the world—young men are all selfish and headstrong alike. You really should be careful, Frank dear, it will not do to arouse him, and there is so much at stake. More than once have I caught him talking to Lawyer Chapman about Laurence Longworth——"

"Never mind about that, mother," cuts in Frank, impatiently, striding up and down once more, "I'll make that all right before long. I shall be home for good in less than a fortnight. Mother," he comes back abruptly and sits down beside her, "I wish you would ask Miss Landelle to go with you to Boston."

"Yes, dear?" says Mrs. Dexter, interrogatively, but more placidly if possible than before, "Miss Landelle? I will if you say so. What a pretty creature she is—the prettiest I think I ever saw."

"Do you really?" Frank cries, and all his honest face flushes and brightens. "Thank you, little mother! Yes, she is beautiful as an angel, and as sweet and as good. You will love her, mother; no one can know her and help it, and so will my uncle——"

"Your uncle, Frank dear!" says Mrs. Dexter, opening her innocent little eyes; "he doesn't know her, you know, and is not likely to, so how can he, you know?"

Frank laughs. He has a subtle plan in his head of which the trip to Boston is only the initial step, but he is not disposed to take his mother into his confidence at present. Old James Longworth is certainly in the pitifully benighted state of not knowing Marie Landelle at present, but out of that depth of darkness his nephew proposes to rescue him.

"Would she like to come, do you think?" inquires the lady. "I should like to take her very much. There is always a sort of distinction in chaperoning a new beauty—people take so much notice of one, and gentlemen are so very attentive, and then I dislike traveling alone. I shall be pleased to take her, Frank, if you really think she will be pleased to go."

"Mother mine," Mr. Dexter cries gayly, "my conviction is, that you are, without exception, the most charming little woman in the world! Like to go? I am certain of it—I have it from her own lips—I—in fact I asked her yesterday and she said she would be delighted."

"Oh! You did. Well then, Franky dear, nothing remains but to obtain Mrs. Windsor's consent. I presume she will not object?"

"I don't see why she should. You will put it to her, mother, as a personal favor to yourself. Say you have taken such a fancy to Miss Marie—which will be true won't it? and that she is looking pale—which is true also—and needs a change; and that you will prize her company so highly, and all that. You will know what to say—women always

do. And, mother, suggest to Miss Fandelle that as you may remain a week, and will be out a great deal, shopping and making calls all day, and going to theaters and places in the evening, she had better fetch a trunk."

"But, Franky, dear, we are *not* going to theaters and places. We shall have no one to take us."

"Oh! yes, you will. You need not say anything about it, but I will be there. Just let it appear in a vague way that your friends will take you. The yacht is to be launched to-morrow morning, and will go at once to Boston. I shall not remain to go in her, but will follow you to-morrow afternoon by train. Then of course I can take you both everywhere, and make things pleasant for you in Boston. And at the end of the week, when the yacht is ready and there, perhaps we can persuade Miss Landelle to take a little trip with us to the Isle of Shoals, and the coast of Maine, and so on. But you need not mention this. Just put your things on, like the dearest and most docile of little mothers, and trot around at once, and ask Dame Windsor for the loan of her granddaughter."

He lifts her bodily out of her chair as though she were a five instead of fifty, and kisses her heartily with a crushing hug.

"Really, Franky dear!" expostulates the good lady, settling her head-dress, "what a great boy you are. Well, as you say, there is no time to lose, so I will dress and go at once. But if Mrs. Windsor should say no——"

"You must not let her!" cries Frank, in alarm. "I insist upon it, mother! Under pain of my dire and deep displeasure, do not take no for an answer. I know how eloquent you can be when you like, and in that eloquence I place my trust now. Put it to her strongly—as an immense personal favor—no one can refuse *you* when you put things strongly!"

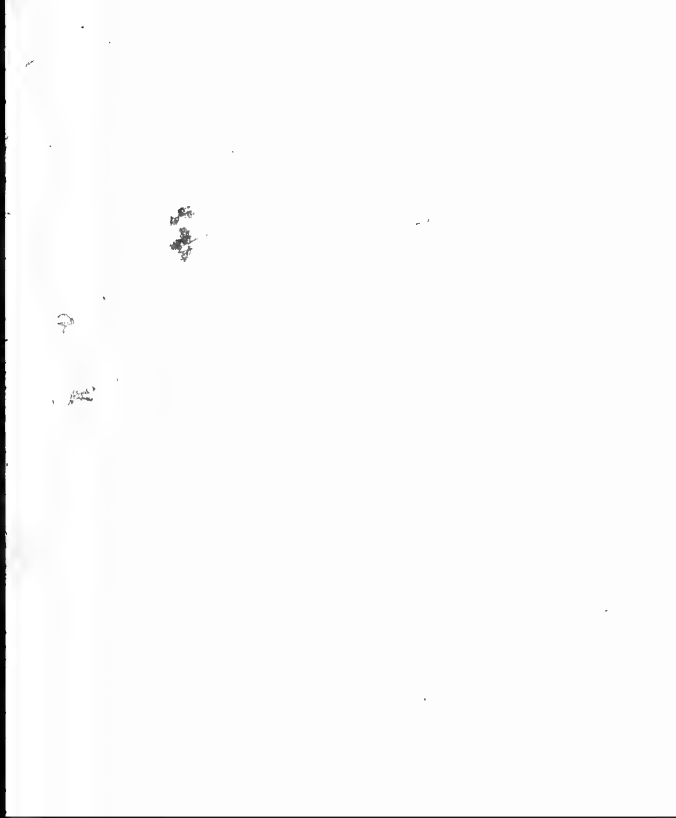
"Really!" says Mrs. Dexter, with a pleased simper, "how

you do go on! I certainly have a command of language—that I have always been told, even from my earliest infancy. I dare say Mrs. Windsor will not object for a week."

"Say nothing of the yacht or of me," pursues this artful plotter; "do not so much as mention our names. Now run away, *madre mio*, and don't be long. I will wait for you here."

Mrs. Dexter dutifully departs, and Frank smiles to himself with satisfaction as he paces up and down. New and strong resolve is written in Mr. Dexter's ingenuous countenance. He has waited and been patient until waiting and patience have ceased to be virtues. He will speak, but not here. Marie will accompany his mother to Boston; during their stay in that center of civilization and intellect, he will devote himself to her amusement and pleasure. The hours shall fly, winged with every new excitement. Then there shall be a dinner on board the yacht, in a cabin fitted up regardless of everything but beauty, luxury, and delight.

After the dinner it will not be difficult to persuade her to join in that charming trial trip to the Isle of Shoals. He has told her of the wild and rugged beauty of the coast of Maine, and she will brave a little sea-sickness for the sake of the picturesque. And then what more natural than to persuade her to return with his mother to Georgia, and in his own "ancestral halls" he will lay his hand and heart at her feet, and implore her to remain, queen and lady paramount, in that sunny, Southern land forever. Is she likely to say no? Is Mrs. Windsor likely to object? Frank's face grows luminous with love and delight as he builds these enchanting air castles, and then, all in a moment there rises before him the image of Durand as he saw him last night, sitting beside her holding her hands in his, speaking impassioned words, gazing at her with impassioned eyes, handsome and picturesque as the most romantic girl's fancy could desire, in his Faulkland dress, and the roseate visions tumble into the dust.



Marie Landelle is not a romantic girl, he more than suspects ; she is too beautiful herself to overmuch prize beauty in a man, but even she cannot be altogether insensible to the dark charm of that face. Nothing could be more tame, and spiritless, and unemotional than her rendering of Julia, except in that one particular scene where she renounces him. *That* she certainly did with relish. Frank is jealous, but even in his jealousy he has to own she gives him no cause. She has avoided Durand ever since his coming, in the most pronounced manner. To all outward seeming Longworth has much more cause for suspicion than he ; and yet, there is a prophetic instinct in love that tells him it is not so, that Durand is Marie's lover, or has been, not Reine's.

Mrs. Dexter descends, and Mr. Dexter clears from his manly brow the traces of moody thought, and escorts her to within a short distance of the Stone House. He lets her enter alone ; it is his diplomatic desire not to appear in the matter at all.

"Don't make your call too long, mother," he says, at parting ; "I will hang around here until you come."

Mrs. Dexter promises, of course, but the call is nearly an hour for all that, and Frank is fuming with repressed impatience before she comes.

"Well?" he says, feverishly, the instant she appears.

"Well, dear," answers smiling Mrs. Dexter, "it is all right. Mrs. Windsor objected a little at first, at the shortness of the notice, but she has agreed to let her go."

Her son's face grows radiant once more.

"Ah ! I knew your eloquence would move a heart of flint, little mother. And Marie—Miss Landelle—what did *she* say?"

"Miss Landelle is a very quiet young lady, dear ; she never says much ; but she smiled and looked pleased, and said she would like to visit Boston very much, if grandmamma was perfectly willing. So it is all settled, my dear boy, and I

expect to enjoy my trip ever so much more with so charming a companion."

"Yes, that is a matter of course. Did—did any one speak of me?"

"Mrs. Windsor asked if you were to be of the party, and I said, Oh, dear, no! you wer'n't coming with *me*—you had to stay and get your yacht launched. I never made the least allusion to your following to-morrow, Frank," says his mother with a diplomatic smile, and her head very much on one side, like an artful little canary. "I dare say Miss Marie will not like Boston any the less for your being the one to show it to her?"

It is quite evident, that as far as his mother goes, Frank's course of true love is likely to run smooth. No one in the world is quite good enough for her boy, of course, but Mrs. Windsor's granddaughter approaches as near her ideal as it is in young lady nature to come. She is a great beauty, she will be a great heiress, her manners are simply perfection—even old Uncle Longworth can find no flaw here. And Uncle Longworth has been heard to say, he wished the boy would marry, and bring a wife home before he died.

Reine is not at home during Mrs. Dexter's call, and when she comes home, an hour or so later, is surprised to find Marie and Catherine busily engaged in packing a trunk. She pauses in the doorway to gaze and wonder.

"Why are you doing this, Marie? What are you about with that trunk? Where are you going?"

"I do not think I will mind that pink silk, Catherine. I am not likely to need it. Oh! is it you, Petite—what did you say? Yes, I am packing. I think that will do, Catherine; you may go, and thanks, very much."

The woman departs, and Marie, on her knees, rests her arms on her trunk and looks at her sister.

"Come in and shut the door, Petite. I am going away for a week, and oh! little sister, how glad I am of even that

reprieve. Since Léonce came, my life has been miserable. To get away even for a few days is happiness unspeakable."

Reine stands looking at her without a word, her dark, solemn eyes seeming darker and more solemn even than usual.

"Why stand there silent?" Marie goes on, in a low, concentrated tone. "Why do you not begin? Why not tell me it is not right, that it is my duty to stay, and so on? Why do you stand there and look at me like a sphinx? Why do you not speak?"

"I have nothing to say. What does it matter whether I speak or am silent? You will do as you please. Where are you going?"

"To Boston."

"With whom?"

"Mrs. Dexter."

And as Marie speaks the name her lovely upraised eyes flash defiance. Reine's lip curls.

"Soit! And with her son, of course?"

"There is no of course. No, we go alone; Mr. Frank remains to look after his yacht."

"When did Madame Dexter ask you?"

"This morning—an hour ago."

"Why did she ask you?"

"When did she ask you—why did she ask you?"

Marie breaks into one of her faint laughs. "You go on like the catechism, Petite. She asked me, she was good enough to say, because she had taken a great fancy to me, and thought my companionship would enhance the pleasure of her trip. Now, Petite, excuse me, we go at two, and it is half-past twelve already."

"Marie, I am not going to remonstrate—it is of no use. I am not going to talk of right or wrong—you do not care. But I *will* talk of prudence. I wonder you are not afraid."

Marie throws back her head with a gesture of disdain.

"Of whom? Of what? I am not afraid. There are some natures that can only be kept in subjection by letting them see we defy them. Let Léonce speak if he dare—he knows the penalty."

"Yes, he knows it well; we talked it over last night; and, Marie, there is that within him of which I am afraid." On his guard he may be while you are here——"

"Ah, yes, greatly on his guard," Marie interrupts, with scorn; "as he was on his guard last night, for example."

"Last night's excitement is not likely to occur again. I say he *may* be on guard; but go, and with Frank Dexter's mother—to be joined later, no doubt, by the son—and I will not answer for the consequences. You know how utterly reckless he can be when he likes. I only say this—take care!"

"Thanks, Petite; I shall take excellent care, be very sure," says Marie, going on with her packing. "If Léonce is inclined to be unreasonable, you must talk to him. I really require a change; I lose appetite and color; his coming has worried me and made me nervous; it would be inhumanly selfish in him to object. But Léonce is selfish or nothing. I shall go, that is fixed as fate; so clear that overcast face, little croaker, and say no more about it."

The look of decision that sets sometimes the pretty mouth and chin of Marie Landelle sets and hardens it now. Reine looks at her for a moment, then resolutely closes her lips, and without a word quits the room.

Still the sisters part friends. In her heart Reine loves Marie far too dearly and deeply to let a shadow of anger or reproach mar even a brief farewell. She kisses her again and again with a strange trembling passion of tenderness that is deepened and intensified by some nameless foreboding.

"I will do what I can," she says, "with Léonce. How much I shall miss you, oh! sister beloved. Take care, I en

treat, and do not, do not fail to return at the end of the week. Let nothing tempt you to linger longer."

"Certainly not, Petite; why should I? Make Léonce go before I come back, if you can. It will be best for all. Tell him I will write to him, and forgive his coming when he is fairly gone."

So they part. Reine stands and watches the carriage out of sight, still with that dull foreboding in her mind of evil to come.

"Is she altogether heartless, I wonder?" she thinks in spite of herself. "Nothing good will come of this journey, I feel that. And last night Léonce promised to go. Who is to tell what he will do now?"

But when, a few hours later, as she walks purposely in the direction of Mrs. Longworth's and meets him, and tells him in rather a tremulous voice, he takes it very quietly. His dark face pales a little, and there is a quick flash at the sound of Mrs. Dexter's name—beyond that no token of emotion.

"So," he says, "she is gone, and with Monsieur Dexter's mother. When does M. Dexter propose joining them, for he is still here?"

"Not at all. How unkind you are, Léonce! as if Marie——"

He smiles.

"Marie can do no wrong—you and I know that, Petite. Did she leave no message for me?"

"None—except a message you will not care to hear."

"Still I will hear it."

"She bade me tell you, then, to leave Baymouth—you know why; and that when you are fairly gone she will correspond with you, and try to forgive you for having come."

"Ah! she will correspond with me and try to forgive me," repeats Durand, and laughs. "That at least is kind; but Marie is an angel of kindness in all things. For so much condescension I am indeed grateful."

"And you will go?"

"No, Petite, I will not. If my staying annoys *you* I regret it; for believe me, my little one, I would not willingly give you annoyance. I will remain until Marie returns—who can tell when we may meet again! Not until the grandmamma dies, and the future is secure—and she looks as if she might live forever, that stately grandmamma. I must speak one parting word to Marie—then indeed——"

Reine sighs resignedly. It is of no use contesting the point. Durand and Marie will go on their own way with very little heed to her counsel.

"You may as well say your parting word now, then, Léonce," she says resolutely, "for this is the very last *tête-à-tête* we will have. As long as you stay in Baymouth, I shall remain strictly in the house. I should not have met you to-day, but it was necessary you should hear of Marie's departure first from me. Now I shall say adieu, and meet you no more."

"M. Longworth commands this?"

"That is my affair. My grandmother forbids it, people talk, and that is enough. You know how I abhor everything clandestine. Go or stay as you please, I will trouble myself about it no more."

"Petite," he says, with real feeling, "you are my good angel, now and always. I ought not to have come. But I swear to you that when Marie returns I will go. I will be patient and wait, although it seems almost impossible, and she is so cold—Mon Dieu, so cold. Adieu, my little sister, and a thousand thanks for all your goodness."

He kisses the hands he holds. At the moment a man passes along the opposite sidewalk—Mr. Longworth on his way to dinner. He lifts his hat, and passes rapidly on.

Reine flushes with vexation, and draws away her hands.

"Léonce, we are in the street, how can you forget yourself! M. Longworth saw us."

"Well, Petite," Durand says, coolly, "and what then? A brother may kiss his sister's hand. Mr. Longworth is on his way to dinner and will favor me with more languid grande seigneur airs than ever. He does me the honor to be jealous, Reine. *Ma foi!* I appear to be a cause of jealousy to more than one gentleman in your little country town."

Reine leaves him abruptly, and goes home, feeling vexed with Léonce for his salute, with Longworth for having seen it, with Marie for her departure, with herself for no particular reason, with all the world in fact. But she is too generous and frank-hearted for moods and fancies, and sits down to the piano and plays away her vapors. Presently it grows too dark, and then she rises, takes a shawl, and hurries away to her favorite twilight seat, on the garden wall.

She sits a very long time, her hands clasped in her lap, her eyes fixed dreamily on the water, and thinks. Five months scarcely have passed since she came to this place, and how much has happened, more than in all her life before. She was unhappy at first, but that has worn away. Léonce frets her; but that is only a passing annoyance, nothing deep. A subtle sense of happiness has come to her of late; she accepts it without caring to analyze its nature too closely. Her grandmother has grown more kind and tolerant since her engagement—perhaps it is that. She likes Miss Hariott, more than likes her; it is always good, and restful, and comfortable to be with her. A real woman friend is such a true and satisfactory thing. She likes Baymouth—dull but not dreary, monotonous but not wearisome. And then there is Mr. Longworth—she pauses in her musing with a smile and a faint blush. Yes, there is always Mr. Longworth. It is well, after all, to have one's future husband chosen for one—one can take him and feel that self-will and sentiment—dangerous things always—have nothing to do with it. Yes, certainly it is well—they manage these things best in France, there can be no doubt. Mr. Longworth is very good—he is

a husband one can be proud of, he has a generous and noble heart, he is not mercenary or he would be Madame Windsor's heir to-day, and she and her sister toiling in London for a scanty living. How very handsome and gallant he looked last night in the scarlet and gold of an English officer.

Yes, decidedly he is handsome, and of fine presence—clever too, which is best of all—man is nothing if not intellectual. It does not so much signify in women—it is not expected of them; people who ought to know say they are better without too much mind, but men—oh! a man should be strong and brave, gentle and tender, upright, generous, and true of heart. All this M. Longworth is, she knows; has she not had proof of it? How grateful, for example, is that blind girl; how well Miss Hariott likes him—Miss Hariott, incapable of liking anything selfish, or sordid, or mean. How her haughty grandmother seeks and respects his opinion—her proud, imperious grandmother who tolerates no advice nor interference from any one else. How strange that he should ever have had a grande passion for that *passée* Madame Sheldon. Do men really outlive and forget such things as that? He has told her he loves her, and he is a man of truth. That faint flush rises again as she recalls his looks, his words, the fire in the eyes that have gazed on her. They are extremely handsome eyes, and perhaps most handsome when anger as well as love flashes from them. If she could only tell him all—but for the present that is hopeless, and he has promised to trust her. What is affection without trust, firm abiding faith and trust through all things. He must wait yet a little longer, and believe in her despite appearances, and meantime she is happy and Baymouth is pleasant, and eighteen a delightful age, and love—Well, love, of course, “the very best thing in all the world.”

She wraps her shawl a little closer around her, for these September nights have a ring of sharpness, and watches a belated moon making its way through windy clouds up to

the centre of the sky. Moonlight is a lovely thing—the world takes a touch of sadness under its pale cold glimmer, life and its noises are hushed, and the soul awakes instinctively to the feeling that human life is not all, and that great and solemn things are written in that star-studded sky. But Reine is neither lonely nor sad, all her presentiments and vexations are gone with that dead day, and she sings as she sits. And presently a step—a step she knows—comes down the path behind her; but, though a new gladness comes into her eyes, she does not look round, but sings softly on:

“Oh! moonlight deep and tender
This sweetest summer flown,
Your mist of golden splendor
On our betrothal shone.”

The step ceases, he is beside her; he has heard her song but he does not speak. She turns and looks up, and to the day of her death never forgets the look his face wears. The smile fades from her lips, the gladness from her eyes; her singing ceases, she sits erect and gazes at him in consternation.

“What is it?” she asks, with a gasp.

“Very little,” he answers. His voice is low and stern, his face fixed and inflexible. “Very little, perhaps, in your eyes. Only this—I overheard you last night.”

For a moment she does not know what he means—then it flashes upon her, and her face blanches.

“You mean——” she says, in a terrified voice.

“I mean your interview with Monsieur Léonce Durand, in Miss Hariott’s garden last night. I did not go out eaves-dropping, I went out honestly enough to smoke, but I chanced to overhear. I heard him claim the right to be with you. I heard him call you his wife!”

She utters a low, frightened cry, and turns from him and covers her face.

"Don't be afraid," he says, a touch of scorn in his tone ; "I am not going to hurt you. I am not even going to reproach you. There is not much to be said between you and me ; but, great Heaven ! how I have been deceived in you ! I stand and look at you and am stunned by it. I thought I knew something of women and men ; I thought in my besotted self-conceit I could read the soul in the face. I looked in yours that day on the deck of the ship and thought I saw a brave, frank, fearless heart, shining out of tender, and truthful, and beautiful eyes. And the end is this !"

She does not speak a word. She sits like one stunned by a blow, so sudden, so cruel, so crushing, that it deadens feeling and speech.

"Your motive for what you have done," he goes rapidly on, "is not so difficult to understand. You knew that whatever shadow of chance you stood unmarried, you stood no shadow of chance married, and married to a Frenchman. You were naturally ambitious to obtain your rightful inheritance, and for the sake of that inheritance you have plotted, and schemed, and duped us all. You played your part as Lydia Languish very well last night, but you shine far more brilliantly off the stage than on. You knew how to make your perversity charming, your petulance bewitching ; your very pride and defiance held a curious charm. You kept me off, and knew that in doing it you lured me on. You were the farthest possible from any ideal woman, and yet you captivated me with your very faults. I believed in you with as trusting a simplicity as the rawest and most unlicked cub of twenty. I was all the more eager to win you because you seemed so hard to win. It was a well-played game ; but your husband, with a man's natural impatience for his wife, comes before your plans are matured, and spoils all. Once before, a woman deceived me, a girl younger even than you ; but I was a hot-headed boy then, and her task was easy. Now, in man's maturity, with the average of man's judgment

in most things, you have done it again, with a skill and cleverness no one can admire more than I do. Laura Longworth was only weak and empty-headed; you are heartless, treacherous, and false to the core!"

She has not spoken or stirred—he has given her no chance to speak; but if he had, it would have been the same. If her life were the forfeit, she could not save it by uttering a sound. He turns, with these last harsh and merciless words, and so leaves her.

CHAPTER XXIV.

NIGHTFALL.

A BLEAK afternoon early in October. In Mrs. Windsor's pretty sitting-room a fire burns cozily, and casts its red gleams between the crimson silk window curtains. In a great arm-chair before this fire, wrapped in a large fleecy white shawl, Mrs. Windsor sits. A small table, with a pitcher of steaming and fragrant lemonade is beside her—a tumbler is in her hand, and she sips this beverage at intervals, as she lies back and contemplates drearily the fire. In a general way this lady is uplifted out of the sphere of ordinary mortals, but influenza is a dread leveler, and influenza has laid its fell hand upon her. Still an empress might suffer with cold in her imperial head, and the snuffles in her august nose, and lose no whit of her majesty. We do not say that Mrs. Windsor does anything so vulgar as snuffle; we do say she is invalided with cold in her head.

She is not alone; her younger granddaughter is sitting by the window looking out with eyes more dreary than her grandmother's own, at the gray, fast-drifting, fast-darkening sky, at the wind-tossed trees, and the threatening of storm at hand. It is not owing to any special pleasure Mrs. Wind-

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sor takes in her younger granddaughter's society that she has her here ; but the cold in her head, and the perfect tempest of sneezes that now and then convulse her, have flown to her visual organs. With eyes weak and watering one cannot amuse one's self with a book, and to sit here all day alone, and unable to read, is not to be thought of. Reine then is here to read to her. The book is a novel, and an interesting one, but it lies closed in Reine's lap now. Grandmamma had had sufficient unto the day of fiction, and the sorrows of heroes and heroines ; vexations of her own are beginning to absorb her.

"That will do," she says, pettishly ; "these books are all alike. Love must have been invented for the pecuniary benefit of the people who write novels. Ring for Jane ; this lemonade is cold."

Reine rises and obeys. The bleak light of the overcast afternoon falls full upon her face as she does so, and Mrs. Windsor is struck by the change in it. More than once during the past week that change has surprised her. A great change is there, but it is so subtle she can hardly tell in what it consists. It can hardly be loss of color, for Reine never has color—it is more that her dusk complexion looks blanched. It is still more the dreary, lonely look in the large eyes, the curve of the mouth fixed in a sort of steadfast, patient pain. She does not sing, she does not play, she does not talk, she does not smile. She never goes out, she loses flesh and appetite daily, she comes slowly when she is bidden, and goes wearily when she is dismissed, with little more of vitality than an automaton might show.

"Reine," her grandmother says, and says it not unkindly, yet with more of curiosity than kindness, "what is the matter with you ? You go gliding about the house like some small gray ghost. Are you not well ?"

"I am very well, madame."

She resumes her seat. Jane appears with a fresh and

steaming pitcher of lemonade, and departs. The young girl listlessly takes up her book.

"Shall I go on, madame?"

"No, I'm tired of it; paying attention makes my head ache. But you may as well remain. I expect a person who owes me a sum of money; he will be here directly, and he will want you to write him a receipt. Stay until he comes."

She leans back and closes her eyes. She is a trifle curious still concerning the change in her granddaughter, but she will inquire no further. Can it be her sister's absence? Nonsense! they seem fond of each other; but to fret over a week's separation would be ridiculous indeed. The house seems desolate without Marie's fair, bright face—she is astonished and vexed at the way she misses her. Then Longworth is absent too, has been absent for five days, and, what is remarkable, was with Reine in the garden the night before his departure, and yet left without stepping in. That is not like Laurence. She opens her eyes and glances at the motionless gray figure at the window.

"Reine."

"Yes, madame."

"Did Laurence Longworth tell you that night last week, where he was going next morning?"

"He did not, madame."

"Did he tell you he was going at all?"

"No, madame."

"Did he not even bid you good-by?"

"Not even that."

"Curious!" says Mrs. Windsor, and knits her brows.

"Why then did he come? What *did* he say?"

"I cannot remember all he said, madame. Certainly not a word about going away the next morning."

Mrs. Windsor turns upon her a keen, sidelong, suspicious look. She is an odd mixture of frankness and reticence,

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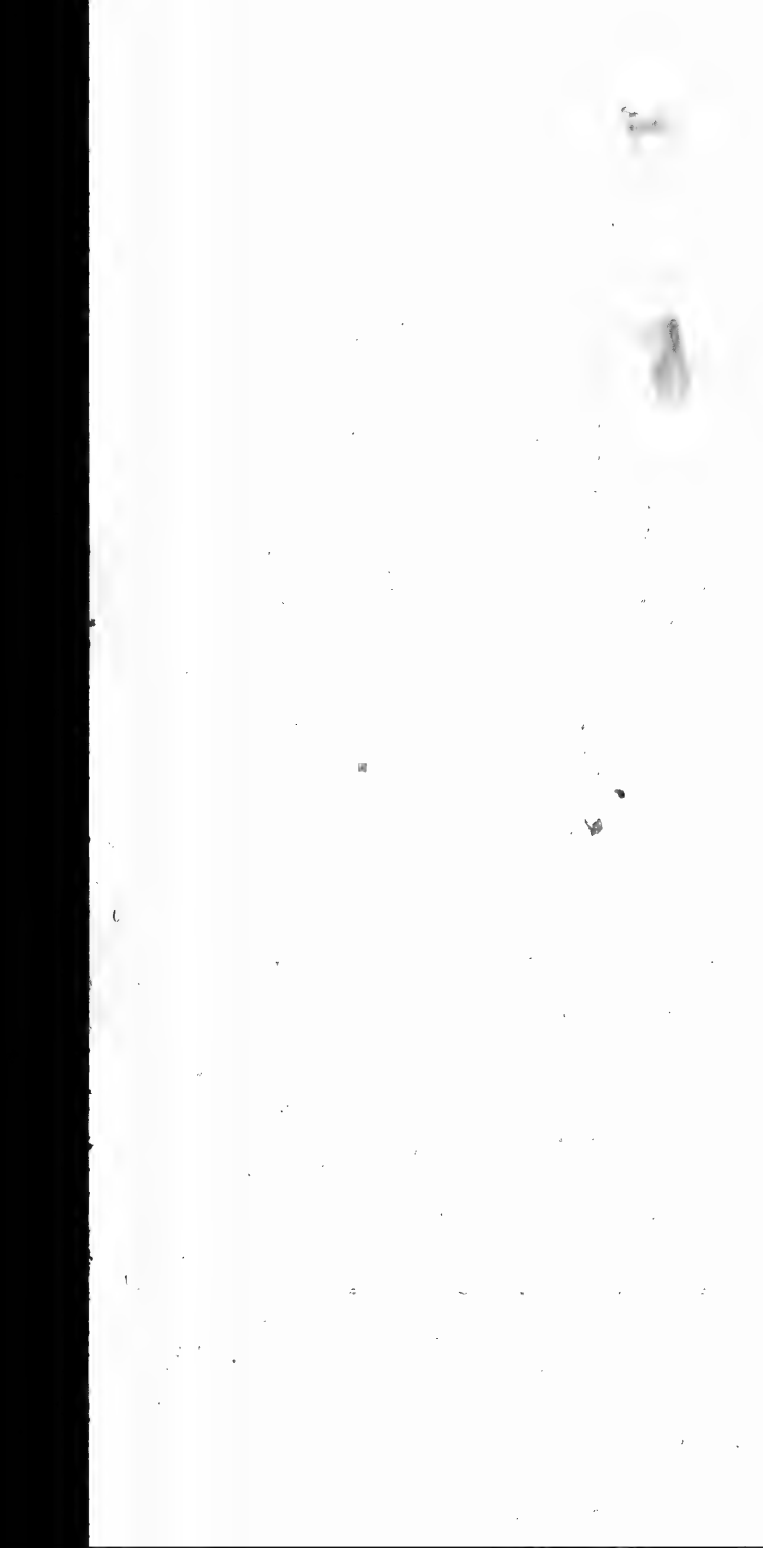
"this youthful relative of hers; if she has made up her mind to be silent, it will be a difficult matter indeed to induce her to speak. One of her most reticent moods is evidently upon her now.

"Can they have quarreled?" she muses. "I thought only sentimental simpletons in love quarreled. And this young woman is not a sentimental simpleton. And if they have quarreled, what have they quarreled about?"

She closes her eyes once more, and this time drops into a doze. Reine throws aside the novel with a tired sigh, and takes apathetically enough another book. It is a book that never leaves Mrs. Windsor's room—it lies beside the ponderous family Bible, and like the Bible is rarely opened by its owner. It is a copy of the "Imitation," beautifully bound, and on the fly-leaf, in a large free hand, is written:

"To the Best of Mothers—on her Birthday. From her Affectionate Son,
GEORGE."

Reine looks at the faded words long. This is the dashing brother, George, of whom she has so often heard her mother speak; the handsome, clever, high-spirited son grandmamma loved with all the love one heart ever held, whose memory is more to her still than all the world beside. She has learned why Longworth has won so close a place to that memory; she wonders if George Windsor really looked like that—tall, fair, broad-shouldered, strong. Her mother was tall and slim, with a thin, fretted face, a weak, querulous voice, and tearful, pale blue eyes. Poor mamma! always ailing and unhappy, always making every one about her unhappy too. No, George Windsor could never have been like mamma; he had bright eyes, and a sunny smile—she had heard him described often. And in the midst of all his youth and beauty, and strong young manhood, he had been struck down doing a good and noble deed. No wonder grandmamma was cold, and stern, and unloving. Who would care





to love in a world where the word was only another name for misery. Love was of Heaven, a plant from paradise, never intended to bloom and blossom in the desert here below !

She opens the book at random—it is a book beloved always, and well known. A marker is between the leaves at the chapter called "The King's Highway of the Holy Cross," and Reine begins to read.

"Sometimes thou shalt be left by God, other times thou shalt be afflicted by thy neighbor, and what is more, thou shalt often be a trouble to thyself.

"For God would have thee to suffer tribulations without comfort, and wholly to subject thyself to him, and to become more humble by tribulation.

"Dost thou think to escape that which no mortal could ever avoid ?"—

She can read no more; she closes the book, replaces it, folds her arms on the table, and lays her face down upon them : "For God would have thee to suffer tribulation without comfort, and become more humble by tribulation." Yes, yes. Oh ! yes, she has been proud, and self-willed, and rebellious, and her punishment has fallen. Her pride is humbled to the very dust, she has been stabbed to the heart in the hour of her exultation. She has lost what she was learning to hold so dear ; she is despised where she was beginning to seek for approbation, scorned where she most wished to be highly held. She does not blame Longworth—he has acted hastily and rashly ; all the same, she could not have explained if he had come in calmest moderation to ask that explanation. How strange he should so have overheard. Is there a fate, a Nemesis, in these things ? She does not blame him ; she only feels crushed, stunned, benumbed, left stranded on some barren rock, the land of promise gone forever, with a drearily aching heart, and a sense of loss and loneliness forever with her. Six days have passed since that moonlight

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night by the garden wall, when she had sat with hidden face, and listened to Longworth's bitter, scathing words. He had gone the next day, Marie is gone, and Miss Hariott, by some fatality, is absent for a few days with some country friends. She has not once stirred outside the gates, she has not once seen Durand during this interval. She has said nothing of her broken engagement. When Longworth comes back he will tell her grandmother; he must tell. She does not know what the result will be, she does not care. Nothing worse can happen than has happened already.

She lies still for a long time. She has slept very little last night, and in the silence and warmth of the room she drops half asleep now. A loud knock at the house-door startles her into wakefulness. She sits upright, and Catherine opens the parlor door, and announces "Mr. Martin."

Mr. Martin, a bluff, elderly man, comes in, and Reine goes over, and gently awakes her grandmother, and tells her her expected visitor has come.

"Well, ma'am," says Mr. Martin in a hearty voice, "here I am, up to time, and with the money down on the nail. Fifteen hundred and fifty dollars, that's the amount, ma'am, ain't it? Here's the cash all correct and proper; but count it over—count it over!"

"Reine," Mrs. Windsor, says, languidly, "count it, please, and then write out Mr. Martin's receipt."

Reine obeys. She counts over the roll of bills carefully, finds the amount right, produces pen and paper, and makes out a receipt for Mrs. Windsor to sign.

"Take this money upstairs," says Mrs. Windsor, "and lock it in the cabinet in my bedroom. Here is the key."

"And when you've locked it up, young lady," interposes Mr. Martin, with refreshing frankness, "I would advise you to take a turn in the fresh air. One of my girls fainted yesterday, and she didn't look a mite paler doing it than you do now."

"Yes, go," her grandmother says, coldly, and looking annoyed; "the heat of this room makes you look wretchedly. Lock the cabinet and leave the key on my dressing-table."

"Ay, ay, look out for the key," says bluff Mr. Martin; "can't be too particular about money. It's a sight easier to lose always than to find. Nobody hadn't ought to keep money in the house anyhow."

"There is not the slightest danger," answers Mrs. Windsor, still very coldly; "burglars are almost unknown in Baymouth, and I keep no one in my house whose honesty I cannot implicitly trust."

Reine leaves the room and goes slowly to her grandmother's bed-chamber. The cabinet mentioned is a frail, but very handsome Japanese affair of ebony, inlaid with pearl and silver. She places the roll of notes in one of the drawers, locks it, and lays the key as directed, on the dressing-table. As she descends the stairs again, she encounters Catherine with a letter.

"For you, Miss Reine," the woman says, and hands it to her. "Law, miss, how white you do look. Quite fainty-like, I declare. Ain't you well?"

For Reine, not Marie, is the favorite of the household now. Time has told, and though Miss Landelle is as lavish of sweet smiles and gentle words as ever, it has been discovered that she is selfish and exacting, and not at all particular as to how much or how little trouble she may give those who attend her.

"She can't even put on her own clothes, she's that helpless," says Catherine, indignantly, "nor so much as button her shoes or her gloves; but, it's please, Catherine, here, and thanks, Catherine, there, Catherine, do this, and Catherine, fetch that, and Catherine, go for 'tother, from morning till night. *She* don't mind, bless you, how often she rings her bell and brings you up two flights to ask you where's the pins that are lying on the table before her eyes, or how her back

hair looks, or her overskirt sets. It don't tire *her* legs, you know. But Miss Reine can do things for herself, and find things, and has a little feeling, and would do without what she wanted sooner than make you fly up again before you got right down. Miss Marie's pretty as a picture, and smiles sweet, I don't deny, and never says a cross word ; but give me Miss Reine for my money, after all."

"I am quite well, thank you, Catherine," Reine answers, and takes her letter.

It is from ~~Marie~~, the first she has received. She goes out, sits down in ~~the~~ porch, opens eagerly, and reads :

BOSTON, Oct. 3d, 18—.

"CHÈRE PETITE :—When you receive this I shall be (as heroines say when they elope) far away. I am not going to elope, but neither am I going back as soon as I had intended. Mr. Frank insists upon our making a trial trip in the famous yacht, and pleads so piteously for my company that it would be cruel to refuse. His mother, and a very charming young lady of this city, form the rest of the party. We visit the Isle of Shoals, and will look at some coast scenery for a few days, not probably more than a week, for I know, in spite of all Mr. Frank's reasoning, that I shall be sea-sick. It is doubtful, however, if I shall return even at the close of this excursion, for Mrs. Dexter urges both Miss Lee (the Boston lady) and myself to accompany her to Georgia for a month. Miss Lee has consented, and Mrs. Dexter has written to grandmamma for me. I hope she may say yes, for I shall really like it extremely. Has Léonce gone? If not, he may as well make up his mind to go. He will certainly gain nothing by remaining. You may show him this letter if you see fit. Adieu, Petite. With your devoted Mr. Longworth by your side, your bosom friend, Miss Hariott, close by, you will hardly miss, even if she goes to Georgia,

"Your own

MARIE."

The letter drops in Reine's lap, her hands clasp with a wild gesture.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*" she says, and sits looking at it, a sort of horror in her eyes. "Gone! and in the yacht with him! and to his home in Georgia! to be absent so long! Oh, how shall I tell Léonce this?"

As if her thought had evoked him, she sees through the trees, stripped and wind-blown, Durand himself approaching the gate at the moment. Can he be coming in? She rises, and runs down the path, and meets him just as he lays his hand on the gate.

"I could endure it no longer," he says; "I made up my mind to brave the dragon, and go to the house to see you. For a week I have been waiting and looking for you in vain. Where have you been?—what is the matter? You look wretched, Petite; have you been ill?"

She does not answer. She stands looking at him, the closed gate between, her face grayish pale in the dull evening light, blank terror looking at him out of her eyes.

"Is it anything about Marie?" he demands, quickly; "is she coming back? Have you heard from her? is that a letter? Let me see it."

He reaches over and takes it out of her hand before she can prevent it.

"Léonce," she exclaims in a terrified voice, "let me tell you first. Do not read the letter. Oh! Léonce, do not be angry with her! Indeed, indeed she means no harm."

He turns from her, and reads the letter slowly, finishes, and reads it again. The afternoon has worn to evening, and it is nearly dark now, but Reine can see the look of deadly pallor she knows only too well blanch his face, sees a gleam dark and fierce, and well remembered, come into his eyes. But his manner does not change; he turns to her, quietly, and hands it back.

"*Allons!*" he says, "so she has gone. Well, I am not surprised; I half expected as much from the first. If she finds the South pleasant, as how can she otherwise in the society of M. Dexter, it is probable she will not return for the winter. She likes warmth; Georgia will suit her much better than Baymouth and a long northern winter."

"Léonce——"

"You are not looking well, Petite," he interrupts, "and M. Longworth is away. Has the one anything to do with the other?"

"Listen, Léonce——"

"No, Petite; let us talk and think of you a little. Some one should think of you, for you never had a habit of thinking of yourself. You are looking ill, and I fear you are not happy. I think too, that M. Longworth is jealous of me, and that my presence here may be the cause of your unhappiness. It shall be the cause no longer. I go to-morrow."

His face keeps its settled pallor, his eyes their dark and dangerous gleam, but his voice is low and quieter, if possible, than usual. She stands looking at him in mute fear.

"I ought never to have come. I know that M. Longworth thinks I am or have been your lover. Undeceive him, Petite, when he returns—tell him the truth. You may trust him; he loves you—in a cold and unsatisfactory fashion, it may be, but after his light. He will keep the secret, never fear, and then for you all will go on velvet. I will not detain you, little one, lest the terrible grandmamma should miss you and make a storm. Whom have we here?"

He draws back. The house door opens, but it is only Mr. Martin going home.

"You ought to have a shawl, miss," says the old farmer; "it is turning chilly, and you'll catch cold. Don't forget to look after the money. I hope you locked it up all safe?"

Reine bows silently. As he opens the gate he catches sight of Durand, and eyes him keenly.

"Sho!" thought the Yankee farmer. "I didn't know she'd got her beau, or I'd have been more careful speaking of the money. Nobody knows who to trust nowadays."

"Who is that?" asks Durand.

"A man who has been paying grandmamma some money."

"A large sum?"

"Fifteen hundred dollars."

"I wish I had it," Durand says, with a short laugh, "I went to Monaco before I came to America, and won enough to keep me ever since. But I am a beggar once more, and Monaco is inconveniently far off."

"I can lend you, Léonce," Reine says eagerly, taking out her purse. "Madame Windsor paid me my quarterly—how shall I call it?—salary allowance yesterday. I do not want it—pray take it."

"Thanks, Petite—it is like you; but no, I will not take it. Keep it for your poor ones. The terrible grandmamma is liberal at least, is she?"

"Most liberal indeed, if money were all."

"I wonder she likes to keep such large sums in the house. It is rather lonely here, too."

"She does not think fifteen hundred dollars a large sum. She generally keeps enough for the current expenses of each month in her room, and there are no robbers in Baymouth."

Durand's eyes lift and fix for a moment on the room that is grandmamma's. He knows it, for Reine once pointed it out, and her own, and Marie's.

"But tell me of yourself," she says. "Oh! Léonce, do not follow Marie. You may trust her indeed. She is angry with you, but she cares nothing for Frank Dexter. It is because she is angry that she goes. You know Marie—she is not easily aroused—it is the sweetest temper in the world; but *when* aroused——"

"Implacable—do I not know it? How am I to follow her?—she gives no address and I have no money. I must go to New York and join my people; the opera season approaches. Have no fears for me, *m'amour*—take care of yourself. Tell M. Longworth; it will be best."

"I cannot. I have promised Marie."

"Break your promise—think of yourself, do not sacrifice your life to her selfishness. She would not for you, believe me. You love her well, but love her wisely; do not let M. Longworth make you unhappy by thinking I am your lover. Petite, may I ask you—am I not your brother?—do you love this cold, stern, proud Monsieur Longworth?"

She turns her face from him in the dim gloaming, and he sees a spasm of pain cross it.

"Ah! I see. I wonder if he knows what a heart of gold he has won. Petite, I am going—who knows when and how we may meet again? Say you forgive me before I go."

"Forgive you, my brother?"

"For coming. I should not have come. I have brought you nothing but trouble. All the amends I can make is to go and return no more. Return I never will—that I swear! Petite Reine, adieu!"

"Léonce! Léonce!" she cries, in an agony; "you mean something. Oh! what is it?"

"I mean nothing, dear Petite, but farewell. Once more, adieu."

He leans forward, and salutes her in his familiar French fashion on both cheeks. Here eyes are full of tears; something in his face, in his eyes, as they look at her, chill and terrify her.

"Léonce!" she says again; but he is gone. Once he looks back to wave his hand and smile farewell. She stands and watches the slight, active figure until he turns the corner and is gone.

The darkness has fallen; she is conscious, for the first time, how bleakly cold it is. A high wind sweeps around her, a few drops of rain fall from the overcast sky. Chilled in the wet and windy darkness, she turns, with a shiver, and goes back to the house.

CHAPTER XXV.

TWO IN THE MORNING.

MRS. WINDSOR'S influenza is worse, Reine discovers, when she re-enters the parlor, and Mrs. Windsor's temper suffers in proportion. The paroxysms of sneezing are incessant now; there appears to be nothing for it but bed betimes, a mustard foot-bath, warm gruel, and a fresh supply of hot lemonade. All these remedies, with the help of Jane and Catherine, are attainable. The lady is helped to her chamber, is placed in bed, the night-light turned down to a minute point, the door is closed, and she is left to repose.

Reine returns below. It is barely eight o'clock, and there is a long evening before her. How shall she spend it? If she were in the mood for music, music is out of the question, with grandmamma invalided above. There are books, but she reads a great deal, and even books grow wearisome. "Of the making of many books there is no end, and much learning is a weariness of the flesh." Everything is a weariness; there are good things in the world, but they do not last—nothing lasts but the disappointments, the sin, the suffering, the heart-break. They go on forever.

Shall she go and see Miss Hariott! Catherine has just informed her that Candace has informed *her* that Miss Hariott has returned. She has missed her friend unutterably, her strong common sense, her quick, ever-ready sympathy for all troubles, great and little. Her troubles are not little, Reine thinks; they are very great and real, and even Miss Hariott is powerless to help her. Still, it will be something only to look into her brave, frank eyes, to feel the strong,

cordial clasp of her hand, to hear her cheerful, cozy gossip, to sit in that comfortable ingle nook which Longworth talks of so often and likes so well. She goes to the window and looks out at the night—black, pouring, windy. But she is not afraid of a little rough weather, and the long hours here alone will be simply intolerable. Yes, she will go. She gets her waterproof and rubbers, pulls the hood over her head, takes an umbrella, looks into the kitchen to tell them, and starts forth into the wet and windy darkness. The distance is not long; she knows the road well; ten minutes' brisk walking will bring her to the cottage, and does.

Yes, Miss Hariott is at home; the light from her windows streams forth cheerily into the bleak, wet street. Reine rings, half smiling to think how surprised her friend will be, and Candace admits her.

"Lawful sakes!" Candace begins; but her mistress' voice from the half-open sitting-room door, breaks in:

"If that's the postman, Candace, don't stand talking there; fetch me my letters instantly."

"It isn't the postman, Miss Hester, honey," says Candace; "it's Miss Reine, come to see you through all the pourin' rain. Lor', chile, how wet you is!"

Instantly Miss Hariott is in the hall, indignant remonstrance in face and tone, struggling with gratified affection.

"You ridiculous child, to come out such a night; but it is awfully good of you to come! You will get your death of cold; but I am delighted to see you just the same. Take these wet things, Candace, and fetch in a nice hot cup of tea, and some of those cakes that smell so good baking out there. Come in, you mermaid, you Undine, and tell me what drove you out such a night. I wonder what Mrs. Windsor was thinking of to let you."

"She did not let me. She is ill in bed with cold, and knows nothing about it."

"You're a self-willed little minx, and like to have your

own wicked way. Sit down here and put your feet to the fire. This is Larry's chair, but you may have it ; it is all one now. He is away, Marie is away, grandmamma's in bed, and all the cats being out of sight, this misbehaved mouse does as she likes with impunity. Now, child, it does me good to sit and look at you. What a little dear you are to come and see me so soon. Have you really missed me ? ”

“ More than I can say, madame. It has been the longest and loneliest week I ever spent in my life. ”

“ Well, that is natural enough. Your sister is gone, and you are wonderfully fond of that pretty sister ; Longworth is gone, and you are wonderfully—no, I won't say it. Has anybody else gone ? ”

“ Somebody is going,” Reine says, drearily ; “ he came to say good-by, poor fellow, just at nightfall. ”

“ You mean that handsome little Monsieur Durand. Well—I ought to be sorry because you are sorry ; but to tell the truth, I am not. ”

“ You don't like Léonce—poor Léonce ! And yet I do not see why. He has his faults, many and great, but he is so gentle, so tender-hearted, so really good in spite of all. And you know nothing of him—why should you dislike him, Miss Hariott ? ”

“ I do not dislike him. I do not like him. I do not trust him. *You* love him, little Queen, very dearly. ”

“ Love Léonce ! ” she repeats dreamily. “ Yes ; I can recall no time when I did not love Léonce. I was such a little creature when I went to Rouen—mamma was always ailing, and she said I tormented her, and Aunt Denise, so gentle and so good to every one, took me home. Léonce was a little fellow then, such a pretty boy, so gay, so loving, so good to me. We grew up together there, in the dear old house, we went wandering together through the dear old town, we explored all the beautiful churches, and life was like one long, sunny summer day. There never was any one

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so kind as Léonce in those days, or so happy as I. I used to go about singing the whole day long, for the very joy of living. But change came, and Léonce went, and death came, and Aunt Denise went, and then followed the war, and I thought I had lost my brother forever. I went to London; so cold, and cheerless, and dark, and bleak it seemed after my Normandy—my dear, dear Normandy that I will never see again! And then Léonce was taken prisoner by those vile Prussians. How we wept that day, Marie and I."

"Marie!" Miss Hariott says, skeptically. She is touched and interested; the girl has never spoken like this of her old home or friends before; but she is not prepared to accept the tears of the elder Mlle. Landelle.

"Do you think Marie did not know and care for him?" Reine says quickly, a slight flush passing over her face; "do you think she has no heart?"

"Well," Miss Hariott responds, "anatomically considered, we all have hearts, and we all have lachrymal glands; but in the light of a damsel in distress, I really cannot picture your calm, white, beautiful sister. Pardon me, Reine, but I really cannot."

"Last of all, worst of all," goes on Reine, "papa died—my dear, handsome, noble father—so patient, so tender, so silent, so sad, always working, never complaining, and loving Marie and me so well. Then we came here, and of all the sorrowful things of my life I am sorriest for that."

"Dear child—sorriest?"

"Sorry, sorry, sorry to the heart! Oh! if Marie had but listened to me and stayed in London! We knew people there, we could have got pupils, we could have worked and lived independently, but she was resolved to come—it was our right, she said, and I—I loved her, and I listened and yielded. If I only had been firm and refused to come!"

"Reine, this is wicked, this is ungrateful, this is unkind—

it is what I never expected to hear from you. At first, I grant you, when all were strangers——"

"And what are they now? What friend have I but you?"

"You have your grandmother, who is good to you after her fashion. You have a safe and secure home——"

"I have a house to live in. But a home!—ah! four walls are not enough for that. Our heart makes our home."

"And," pursues the elder lady, "you have the man you are going to marry——"

But Reine lifts her hand and stops her. The warmth which the fire-light and Candace's tea have brought into her face, dies slowly out.

"Say no more," she interposes. "Yes, I am unkind and ungrateful. But when I think of the past, and the old home lost forever, of my beloved France, which I will never see again. I forget to be grateful. Heaven is good, but life is so long—so long, and things happen that are so hard to bear. I try not to think, I try not to go back to the life that is gone, but sometimes I sit, and this dull town and these quiet streets fade away, and I am in the old garden on the hill just above Rouen, and the grapes and apricots shine on the white, sunny wall, and old Jeannethon is gathering vegetables in the kitchen garden, and Aunt Denise is knitting in the porch, and Léonce comes up, singing as he comes, and then—I wake with a start, and it is in Baymouth, not Rouen, Massachusetts, not Normandy, Madame Windsor, not Aunt Denise, and Léonce—oh! yes, Léonce is here, but not the Léonce of those days. Nine!" She rises abruptly. How long I have stayed, and how much I have talked! Did I ever talk so much before!"

"Never! Little Queen," Miss Hariott answers, "Dear Little Queen, you are not looking well. You are pale and thin as a shadow. What is the trouble?"

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"No doubt; but Candace will accompany you for all that. Come to-morrow, little one, and let us talk it out. I wish I could help you. I wish I could make you happy. I am your fairy godmother, you know, and the little princess always goes for help to her fairy godmother."

"Dear *Marraine*, there is no such a fairy godmother. You *have* helped me. Only to come here and talk nonsense as I have done for the past hour is a help."

"And you will return to-morrow?"

"Do I not always return? Yes, I will come. To-morrow I will be indeed alone."

"When is M. Durand coming back?"

"Never!"

"Indeed? When does Laurence Longworth return?"

"I do not know."

"You do not know! Does he not write to you then?"

"No—why should he? Do not let us talk of him, please. And I wish you would not insist upon sending Candace."

But Miss Hariott does insist, and Candace holds the umbrella, and goes through the rain to the Stone House. Black and rayless, buried in funereal trees, it stands like some goblin castle, so dark a contrast to the little white cottage, that even Candace regards it with eyes of distrust and disfavor.

"A mighty dull place for a young lady like you, Miss Reine," says she; "and Miss Windsor must be a mighty dull lady to live with. I wish you belonged to Miss Hester and me, honey."

"I wish I did, Candace. Thank you for coming, and good-night."

Candace departs. Catherine answers the knock, takes her young lady's wet outer garments to the kitchen, and Reine, feeling oppressed and wretched, goes upstairs to her own

room. How silent the old house is, such a lonesome, rambling old house for four women to occupy. She opens her grandmother's door noiselessly; the night light burns dimly, the night drink is on a stand by the bedside. Mrs. Windsor is deeply asleep. She shuts the door, and returns to her own room, which is directly opposite. She can hear rain beating against the glass, the wind making a dull, ceaseless surge among the trees, and farther off, mingling with both, the deeper and more awful voice of the ocean. What a wild night it is! She wonders with a shiver of apprehension if Marie is tossing about in the frail yacht along the rock-bound coast of Maine. How miserably ill she will be, and Marie abhors illness, and pain, and annoyance of any kind, and shrinks from the very shadow of life's lightest trouble.

"If I could only help her," Reine thinks, "I would take her share and my own too. But I cannot. I may suffer for her, but she must suffer for herself as well. Oh! if Léonce follows her! and in his face this evening I saw the foreshadowing of some desperate resolve. She will never yield—she is inexorable as fate, and he is passionate, and jealous, and reckless. The truth will come out, and all she desires most on earth will be lost forever. And then—what then?"

She sits down, her head resting wearily against the back of the chair, silent and motionless, for a long time. Her head aches—or is it only her heart? A sense of foreboding fills her; but, stranger than all, a sense of fatigue weighs her down. She rises presently, as the loud-voiced clock in the hall strikes ten, and slowly and wearily prepares for bed. Perhaps that whispered prayer for strength, for the doing of "*ta volonté suprême, O Dieu notre père!*" is faint and tired, but it is heartfelt, and she goes to bed. Her heavy eyelids sway and fall almost immediately, and she is half asleep before her head is well on the pillow. Once she starts awake again at some noise, but it is only Jane and Catherine going

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up to their bedrooms on the floor above. Then profound stillness falls, and Reine is soundly and deeply asleep.

She sleeps long and dreamlessly, but she awakes suddenly, broad awake in an instant, her heart beating fast and hard, and sits upright in bed. What was that? Was it only the old eight-day clock tolling two? The last wiry vibration yet moves the quivering air, but surely there was something else—surely she has heard a cry—a sharp, sudden, piercing cry of mortal pain or fear! Her heart throbs so frantically as she sits up erect in the darkness, that for a moment she can hear nothing else. She listens and waits, her eyes dilated and wild; but no other cry follows—all is profoundly still. The very rain has ceased, and a wan glimmer of moonlight pierces the window curtains, and falls upon her white, terrified face. She can catch a glimpse of the writhing trees outside, of the black, wind-blown night sky. Has she dreamed that sharp, quick, agonized scream? Has she had nightmare and screamed out herself? It had seemed to her to come from across the hall, from Mrs. Windsor's room. Has the sick woman grown worse in the night and called out for help?

Instantly Reine is out of bed, trying to dress herself with trembling fingers and shaking nerves. She thrusts her feet into little velvet slippers, opens the door without noise, and looks across in terror at that opposite door. Then she tiptoes towards it; it is closed as she has left it; the dull light shines through keyhole and crevice, and—Great Heaven! what is that! Who is in the room? For there is a sound—the sound of stealthy footsteps; there is another sound—the sound of a key fitting cautiously in a lock. In a second she knows it all—robbers are at work behind that closed door, murderers it may be; and that shriek—that one wild, horror-stricken shriek, the death cry, perhaps, of her grandmother!

A panic of mortal terror seizes the girl. In a moment it may be that door will open and she will share her grandmother's fate. There is a table close to where she stands;

she holds to it with both hands to keep from falling. The floor seems to heave beneath her feet, and without sound or word she sinks upon it, and half lies, half crouches, in a heap. One or two broad rays of moonlight gleam fitfully into the dark hall, but where she has fallen is in deepest gloom. So crouching, she strains every nerve to listen. She feels no sense of faintness; every faculty seems preternaturally sharpened. The grating key has evidently not fitted; she hears the sharp, metallic sound of steel instruments at work. Tick, tick, click, she can hear, too, from the clock downstairs—how weirdly loud is the beating of its brazen pulse; it seems to drown even the horrid click of those tools that are forcing the locks. Then there is an interval—an hour it seems—one minute, perhaps, in reality, and then—oh Heaven! the door slowly and softly opens, a white hand stretches forth, and so holds it one listening second. Her dilating eyes are fixed on that hand; surely the gleam of the large, flashing ring it wears is familiar to her. A stealthy step follows, then the thief stands on the threshold and casts one quick glance up and down the hall. She crouches not three feet from where he stands, but he only looks before him, and sees nothing. She sees him, however; the pallid gleam of the moonlight falls full on his face. He crosses the hall rapidly and noiselessly, turns down the stairs and disappears.

One, two, three, four, five, six; lying there in the chill gallery, Reine counts the sonorous ticking of the noisy Dutch clock; or perhaps it is not the clock so much as the sickening heavy throbs of her own heart. She counts on and on; it seems to her as if it must continue forever, as if she must sit huddled here in the darkness and cold, and the minutes of this ghastly night go on eternally. Hours seem to pass, and then, all at once, with a mighty, rushing sound, the clock strikes three.

She springs to her feet, the spell is broken, and almost screams aloud, so jarring, so discordant seem the strokes to

overstrained nerves. Only three o'clock, just one hour since that cry for help rang through the house, and the hours she has been here are only one hour after all. She puts her hand to her head in a dazed sort of way. Something must be done, and at once, but what can she do? She looks in awful terror at the half-open door of her grandmother's room. If she goes in there what will she see? Will her eyes rest on some fearful sight on the bed yonder, and be stricken blind with the horror of it forever? She stands for a while, then slowly, with wide-staring eyes, moves forward. In the doorway she lingers. The light is burning a little more brightly than when she looked in last, a few small keys lie on the carpet, the drawers of the Japanese cabinet stand open—this she takes in at the first glance. Then slowly and reluctantly her eyes turn to the bed. No blood-stained sight of horror meets her. Mrs. Windsor lies there, her face calm and still, her breathing deep and heavy, unhurt and asleep.

The revulsion of feeling is so great, so unutterable, that Reine drops into the nearest chair, sick and faint. The money is gone, but no murder has been done. Her head falls heavily against the chairback, but she rallies almost directly, sits up, and now for the first time becomes conscious of something that has hitherto escaped her. A curious smell fills the room, a faint, sweet, fetid, penetrating odor. She has never inhaled it before, and now, too, she sees a sponge lying on the breast of the sleeping woman. What a curious thing to be there!

She goes over to the bed, lifts the sponge, and holds it to her face. Faugh! the smell is almost intolerable—this sponge has been impregnated with it. Then she knows—she has never inhaled it before, but she knows—it is chloroform, and it is the overpowering odor of chloroform that fills the room.

Fully aroused now, Reine can act. Her first act is to throw the window wide and let in a rush of fresh, pure air, her next

to put the sponge and scattered keys in her pocket. In a very few minutes the atmosphere is again endurable, and the oppression that seems to overpower Mrs. Windsor's slumber is gone. There is no need to linger longer. She closes the window, moves the sleeper gently into an easier position ; then she leaves the chamber, shuts the door, and goes back to her own.

She does not return to bed ; she sinks down on her knees by the bedside, agony in the upturned face, agony beyond all telling in the desolate heart. She has but one cry, and it ascends, strong enough in its anguish to pierce heaven :

"Have mercy on him ! Oh, God, have mercy on him !"

CHAPTER XXVI.

ANOTHER DAY.

MR. LONGWORTH returns to Baymouth very early in the afternoon of the day following that stormy October night. The storm has not interfered with his journey ; he has slept all night in a palace car, lulled by the rocking motion and the beating of the rain on the glass. He hastens to his boarding-house at once, finds himself in time for luncheon, and also for the dish of gossip daily served up with that midday refection.

"Mrs. Marie Landelle is away with the Dexters, mother and son—has spent a week with them in Boston, and is cruising about now upon the high seas in her namesake, the Marie. A pleasant night they must have had of it, too ; it is to be hoped Mr. Frank has secured a competent skipper, and pilot, and crew. *His* affair may be looked upon as settled. Lucky young dog, Mr. Frank, prospective possessor of a princely fortune and a peerless wife." This says Mr.

Beckwith, going into the edibles with the energy of a constitutionally hungry man. Miss Hariott has returned, Mr. Longworth will be rejoiced to hear, says Mrs. Beckwith. Mons. Léonce Durand has packed his belongings and departs to-day; says Mrs. Sheldon, languidly regretful, and they all expect to miss him *so* much. And what is odd about it, chimes in Mamma Longworth, sharply, is, that Mr. Durand has not been in all night, his bed has not been slept in, and nobody seems to know what has become of him. All this Mr. Longworth listens to in cold, unsympathetic silence. Durand's going is nothing to him, nothing whatever—with these people he is done forever. A stern, intense anger against Reine fills him; intense scorn for himself mingles with it. How easy a dupe she has found him—he, calling himself a man of the world, knowing that guilt can look at you with open and fearless face, while innocence shrinks and shivers, had yet taken this girl into his heart almost at sight and fallen in love with those bonnie brown eyes and that frank and fearless smile. Why, in his experience as a New York reporter he had once stood face to face with a murderess—a little blue-eyed, soft-faced woman, and had sworn in his heart never to trust one of her kind again. And this is how he has kept that vow. She has led him on and laughed at him, and from first to last was Durand's wife. She has looked up with those truthful eyes, and lied in his face. In the first hours of his passion he could understand how men killed such women, but that is all past now. He has learned his lesson, and learned it well; he will think the worse of all women for the sake of this one. Intense, pitiless anger fills him; he would not lift a finger, it seems to him, to save her from death. The Hindoos, who leave the female children to perish in the Ganges, have something to say on their side of the question after all. If a few thousand of the surplus female children born into the world every year were made into one grand suttee, mankind and morality would profit.

The editor of the *Phoenix* goes to business in a temper eminently suited to tackle his enemy of the *Herald*, and rout him with immense slaughter. Mr. O'Sullivan looks up from work to greet his chief with the office news of the last few days. He also adds an item—not office news.

"Here's a queer paper of Durand's," he says. "May I never, if he hasn't eloped!"

"Eloped?"

"With himself, faith," says O'Sullivan, with a grin. "Peter was at the station this morning at six—he expected a parcel from the conductor; and who does he see jumping aboard but our friend Robert the Devil. He was out all night—gambling, you may take your oath—faith, it's one of the honorable profession of blacklegs he is, or I'm mistaken in him. That's the end of the captivating Léonce, and it's many's the dry eye he leaves behind him!"

Longworth passes on, seats himself at his desk, and peruses with lowering brow yesterday's scather in the *Herald*. Then he draws a sheet of paper before him, dips his pen viciously in the inkstand, and is fairly immersed in his congenial task, when a tap at the door interrupts him.

"Oh! come in and be hanged to you!"

"Sure it's not me, chief," says the deprecating tones of his second; "it's one of Mrs. Windsor's women. She's below, and she wants ye."

"What does she want? Send her here."

Catherine enters, her face pale, her manner fluttering, her eyes excited.

"Oh! Mr. Longworth, please, sir, such a dreadful thing! Misses is almost murdered, and we don't none of us know what to do. Miss Reine don't seem like herself, and she sent me here."

"Miss Reine sent you here?"

"No, sir, Mrs. Windsor. Robbers broke in last night, and took away all her money, hundreds and hundreds of dollars,

and gave her chloroform, and nearly killed her! The doctor's there, and he says her nerves are dreadful. She sent me here for you at once. And please do come, sir, for we don't none of us know what to do."

Longworth listens in silent concern. He has often warned Mrs. Windsor against her habit of keeping large sums of money in the house, but Baymouth is honestly disposed, burglaries are rare, and she has not heeded. That she has been robbed at last does not greatly astonish him—it has only been a question of time.

"I will go immediately," he answers; "run in and tell Mrs. Windsor so. But I am afraid there is nothing I can do."

Still he knows, with the usual inconsequence of women, his very presence will be a relief and reassurance. Robbed! who can be the robber? Some one who knows her habit and knows the house; no stranger has done the deed.

He reaches the house and is conducted to Mrs. Windsor's room. He expects to find Reine in attendance, but the invalid is alone. She lies among her pillows as white as they, a terrified look in her usually calm, cold eyes—evidently the shock has been very great.

"My dear Mrs. Windsor," Longworth says, taking a seat by the bedside, and the hand she gives him, "I am very sorry for this. You are looking dreadfully; why, you are in a fever! How has all this happened?"

"Laurence!" Mrs. Windsor says in a tense tone, her eyes glittering, "I know the man!"

"Indeed? He was not masked then? Some one of the town? Do I know him?"

"It was the Frenchman, Durand!"

He drops her hand, and stares at her in consternation.

"It was my daughter's relation. It was the Frenchman, Durand! I believe Reine Landelle told him of the money and admitted him here last night!"

But Longworth only sits perfectly dumb with the shock of this announcement, staring at her.

"I saw his face as plainly as I see yours now," she goes on excitedly. "I was asleep, I suppose, when he entered; but some slight noise he made awoke me. A man was fitting a key in that cabinet yonder behind you. I started up in bed, and screamed out. Like a flash he turned and I saw his face. Before I could cry out again he had put his hand over my mouth, and held a sponge saturated with chloroform under my nostrils. I remember no more. This morning I woke from my drugged sleep to find the room in perfect order, the cabinet as usual, the money gone, and myself sick as death from the overdose of the drug!"

"This is horrible!" Longworth says, finding his voice. "I cannot realize it. But why should you suspect Made-moiselle Reine? Surely she knows nothing of this."

"She was the only one who knew of this money. When Mr. Martin left he saw her whispering to him across the gate—he was here this morning and told me."

"Still——"

"Look here, Laurence!" She holds up a handkerchief, marked with the name in full, "Reine Landelle." "Catherine found this at my bedside this morning. It was not there last night."

"Still——"

"Look here! look here!" In a state of feverish excitement she holds up to view a sponge and two or three small keys. "Catherine found these in her room this morning—they fell out of her dress-pocket. The woman is her friend—she would not have told if she had thought it could hurt her. Smell that sponge—has it been soaked in chloroform? I tell you she told him of the money, I tell you she let him in, and was with him here last night. His keys would not fit; he had to pick the lock. Laurence, you have had an escape. I never liked her, I always knew she was

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bad, bad, bad to the core. You must give her up, and at once."

He rises from his seat and walks to the window. He has given her up, he believes her false and treacherous, but it wrings his heart to hear this,

"Have you asked her?" he says, coming back. "It is not fair to condemn her unheard. Your evidence is circumstantial evidence, the most unreliable in the world. It may only be a combination of circumstances; she may be innocent in the face of it all."

"You do not believe one word of what you are saying. I can see it in your face. No, I have not seen her, I never want to see again. Catherine tells me she has kept her room, that she looks dazed with terror—guilt would be the better word. Well she may! she is guilty of something worse than a crime, she is guilty of being found out."

"What do you intend to do?"

"I intend to turn her out. Yes, this very day. Not another night shall she sleep under this roof; it has never been a shelter for thieves. Let her go and join her robber lover, for he is her lover, and followed her here. What he has stolen from me will keep them for a while; when that is gone she can help him to steal more."

"Madam, you are merciless! You must not act in this reckless way, for your own sake. Remember, she is your granddaughter, your child's child."

"My curse on them—the mother who fled from me, the daughter who has disgraced me! The name of Windsor has been dishonored by them both. How dare you plead for her! But for you these girls never would have set foot in this house!"

"No need to remind me of that. I regret my ill-starred advice as deeply as you do. Still, justice is justice. Condemn her if you like, but hear her—send for her, and ask her to tell you the truth."

She seizes the bell-rope, and pulls it before he has fairly spoken the words. In all the years he has known her, Longworth has never seen her proud self-control, even in intense anger, desert her before.

"Not now?" he cries; "not before me! I will not stay!"

"I say you *shall* stay!" she cries, passionately. "You have pleaded for her—you shall stay and hear her plead for herself. If you leave me now, I will hate you as long as I live!"

He falls back. Catherine enters, looking flurried and scared. She, too, has never seen her mistress like this.

"Where is Miss Reine?"

"In her own room, ma'am."

"Tell her to come here."

The girl goes. Once more Longworth starts to his feet.

"Mrs. Windsor, it will be in the very worst possible taste for me to remain. Consider——"

"I will consider nothing. Remain you must and shall, confront her in her guilt."

The door opens on the moment—retreat is impossible—and Reine enters. Her dreary eyes fall upon him, then turn to the figure sitting upright in the bed. She slowly advances.

"You sent for me, madame?"

She is pale, and cold, and miserable; but the mastering expression of her face is one of utter weariness. She looks worn out, as though even to speak or move were unutterable labor and pain. And once again Longworth thinks, as he gazes gloomily at her:

"If guilt can look with such eyes as these, how is mortal man to know innocence or truth in this world?"

"I sent for you," Mrs. Windsor answers, with suppressed vehemence. "You expected to be sent for, did you not? I sent for you to ask you a few questions. Were you or

were you not, in this room between two and three this morning?"

Reine stands mute.

"Will you answer?"

"I cannot," she says, in a stifled voice.

"You hear!" cries Mrs. Windsor, turning in a dreadful sort of triumph to her friend—"she cannot! Are you, then, afraid to tell a lie, mademoiselle? I have heard that there is honor among thieves, but I never heard it was so nice."

"Madame," Reine says, but there is no defiance in her tone, no flash in her eye, "I am no thief."

"No? Nor the aider nor the abettor of one? You did not tell the Frenchman, Durand, last night, across my gate, where I forbade him ever to come, of this stolen money?"

Silence.

"You did not admit him last night into this house?"

"Madame, no, I did not."

"You were not with him in this room between two and three in the morning? You did not hide in your pocket the sponge with which he stupefied me? You do not even know, perhaps, that he stole the money? Answer me! Mr. Longworth believes in your innocence—I want you to prove it with your own lips. Answer!"

She throws her hands up over her face, and there is a cry that goes through Longworth's heart like a knife.

"Oh! my God!" she says, "I am a sinner, but what have I done to deserve this!"

"Mrs. Windsor," Longworth exclaims, passionately, "this must cease. Reine," he takes her hand and almost crushes it in the unconscious intensity of his grasp, "come with me. I must speak one word to you alone."

She lets him lead her out. In the passage he stops, still grasping her hand.

"Reine," he says, "for the honor of all women, tell me that you know nothing of this robbery. It was through me

you first came here—in some way I feel answerable for you through that."

"I wish," she cries out, and wrenches her hand free, "that I had been dead before I ever came!"

"There are worse things in the world than death. But tell me—you know nothing of this?"

She stands silent. In the eyes that met his there is the look of a hunted animal at bay, with the knife at its throat.

"I will tell you nothing," she answers, looking at him steadily; "not one word."

They stand for a moment face to face. He is deadly pale, but something that is almost a flush of scorn, of defiance, has risen over the gray pallor of her face.

"I am answered," he says, slowly; "as Mrs. Windsor says, you were in her room this morning with the thief Durand. Then Heaven help you, and help me, who once believed in you. I thought you almost an angel of light—truthful, noble, innocent as a very child. And you are the wife of a gambler and a burglar, his aider and helper. Go to him! You are well fitted for each other! From this hour I shall have only one hope in connection with you, and that, that I may never look upon your face again!"

He turns and leaves her. In the hall below he meets Catherine.

"Tell Mrs. Windsor I will come again to-night," he says. "I am busy now," and so goes.

The girl runs upstairs. In the upper hall Reine still stands as he has left her, her hands locked together, her eyes fixed, her face stony. Something in that frozen agony of face and attitude frightens the servant, and she bursts out crying:

"Oh, Miss Reine! Miss Reine! You were always so gentle and kind, and to think that it was me found the sponge! If I'd known, I'd cut my hand off before I ever took them to missis. I'll never believe you knew a thing about the robbery to the day of my death!"

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Slowly Reine seems to awake, and after a second's blank stare holds out her hand.

"Thank you, Catherine," she says, drearily ; "and thank you again, before I go away, for all the attention you have paid me since I have been here."

"Oh ! miss, are you going ? Oh ! what will Miss Marie say when she comes back !"

A sort of shudder passes over her listener. She turns from her, and opens once more her grandmother's door. Mrs. Windsor has fallen back among the pillows, panting from her recent excitement, but excited still.

"What ! You again !" she exclaims. "You dare to enter here ! Is there anything Monsieur Durand forgot last night that you would like to secure before you go ?"

"Madame," Reine says, and approaches the bed, "do not say any more. One day you may be sorry for having said so much. I want nothing—I have taken nothing. I thank you for all you have given me, and I am going away, and will come back no more."

The woman before her, who has always disliked her, who has reined in that dislike, lets the rage that consumes her have uncontrollable vent now.

"Go !" she cries. "Yes, go, you viper, you thief ! You daughter of a thief ! Your beggarly father came and stole my child, your beggarly lover comes and steals my money ! Go ! the sight of you is hateful to my eyes ! Go, I say—go at once !"

"At once," the girl drearily repeats.

"This hour, this moment, and never return. All the disgrace that has ever touched me has come upon me through you and yours ! You shall disgrace me by your presence no longer. Last night's booty will keep you in comfort for a while, and when it is gone you know well how to get more. Go, and living or dead never let me see you again !"

Without a word, Reine turns and goes. In her own room,

hers no longer, she stands for a little, her hand to her head, trying to steady herself and recall her dazed thoughts.

She is to go, and at once. Yes, that is easily understood. She glances around; her preparations need not take long. All she brought with her is still in her old French trunk. The few things necessary to take immediately she puts in a bag; not one article that Mrs. Windsor's abhorred money has bought among them. Her purse with the last quarter's allowance is in her pocket; she cannot do without that. Longworth's diamond is on her hand; she sees it, takes it off, and lays it on the table. Then she puts on her hat and jacket, and is ready.

She does not meet either of the women-servants as she goes down stairs. She opens the house-door and stands for a moment taking a farewell look at all about her.

The evening is dull and overcast; clouds hurry across the sky—last night's storm has not entirely stormed itself out—it intends to rain again before morning. But on the train, the rain will not interfere with to-night's journey.

She is going to New York. It is a large city, and she has been in it for a brief time; she has no other object in selecting it. What she will do when she gets there, she does not yet know.

The night-train leaves at seven; it is not much past five now. What will she do in the interval? Then she remembers she has promised to call and see Miss Harriott this evening, and she will keep her word. Surely Miss Harriott has not heard the vile news yet; she cannot unless Longworth has gone and told her, and she does not think he is capable of doing that. Yes, she will see Miss Harriott once more for the last time. How very sorry she is to lose Miss Harriott's esteem, so good a woman, whose respect and affection are well worth having.

She shuts the door and walks slowly away. At the gate she pauses and looks back for a moment. The somber

Stone House seems to stare at her frowningly out of its many glimmering eyes, a scowl seems to darken its dull, gray front. Oh, ill-omened home into which she has been forced, out of which she is driven, a criminal and an outcast. One great heart-wrung sob breaks from her, then she hurries away, homeless, friendless, into the darkening night.

CHAPTER XXVII.

REINE'S KNIGHT.



MISS HARIOTT sits alone, over a book. She is an inveterate bookworm, and heavy or light literature, according to her mood, is alike devoured and digested. Her book this evening is a novel, a new and popular one, well and spiritedly written, and the thoughtful interest of the story absorbs her. She lays it down at last with a rueful face.

"I know what Longworth will say about this book—that looked upon simply as a story to while away an idle hour, it is well told and fulfills its mission; that looked upon as the teacher of any particular truth, it is a failure, and that he who reads will rise from its perusal neither sadder nor wiser than when he sat down. Well, why should he? The story is strictly moral, though it inculcates no especial moral, and my experience is, that the novelist who sets out to preach a sermon through the mouths of half a dozen fictitious characters, spoils two good things, a sermon and a story. In the main story writers seem to understand that their mission is as much to amuse as instruct, to show us life as it is or might be, and for the rest say to us tacitly, as Virgil to Dante, 'Let us not talk of these things—let us look and pass on!'"

The little cottage parlor is as it always is, cozy, homelike,

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warm, and bright. The shine of the fire glints on the picture frames, sparkles on the keys of the open piano, and flashes on the pretty womanly knick-knacks scattered carelessly everywhere. She gets up, pushing aside book and work-basket, walks to the window, and looks out at the dark and gusty evening.

"I wonder if my Little Queen is coming?" she thinks. "She promised, and she invariably keeps her word—rare and precious quality in young ladyhood. Something is the matter with the child, something more than ordinarily serious, something more than the going of this young Frenchman. Can she and Larry have quarreled? But that is hardly likely either—what is there to quarrel about? She cares more for him than she is willing to own even to herself, and he, perhaps, is exacting. Ah! I knew she would not fail! Here she is!"

She hurries to the door, and holds it open. Reine closes the gate and comes slowly up the path, carrying a large handbag, her face so pale, her step so lagging and weary, that Miss Hariott knits her brow in anxious perplexity.

"What on earth is the matter with the girl?" she thinks. "Has that gorgon of a grandmother been nagging the life out of her, or is it only the departure of Durand?"

She takes Reine in her arms, and kisses her cordially, looking searchingly into her face.

"Oh, rare pale Margaret! You come gliding like a ghost out of the gloaming. How white, and cold, and wretched you look! Are you sick? Are you worried? What is it that troubles my Queen? Tell your fairy godmother."

But Reine only sinks in silence into her chair, and lays her head in a tired, spiritless way against the cushion.

"Are you in trouble, dear? I wish I could help you—I wish you could tell me. Is it your grandmother? Has she been annoying you?"

"She would tell you I have been annoying her—something

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more than annoying her. Oh, Miss Hariott! dear and true friend, I am in trouble—yes, my heart is almost broken, but I cannot tell you. Where would be the use? You could not help me, no one in the world can. A little while ago, and it would have been different—a few words might have cleared all up; now it is too late, too late forever. There are things one may forgive, but never, never forget. No, do not look at me like that; I cannot tell you indeed, and you could not help me if I did. There are some sorrows no one can help us to bear; we must endure them alone. To-morrow you will know—every one in the town will know what has happened; but to-night I do not want to speak or think of it. Let me sit here, and listen to you, and forget for a little if I can."

Miss Hariott looks at her, and listens to her in wonder and silence. Her words falter as she speaks them, her eyes are haggard, a white spent look blanches her face. At last the lady of the house speaks, and the strong, practical common sense that is her leading characteristic marks every word.

"My dear child," she says, briskly, "there is an exhausted look in your face that I have seen before, and recognize, and don't like. Have you had tea?"

"Tea?" Reine repeats, faintly; "no."

"I thought not. Dinner?"

"No." Miss Hariott stares.

"No dinner! Breakfast?"

"Yes—no—I forget," the girl answers, and puts her hand to her head. "No, I believe I have eaten nothing to-day."

"Gracious powers!" cries Miss Hariott, and sits bolt upright in blank consternation; no dinner—no breakfast—no—"

She springs to her feet, opens the door, and calls loudly for Candace. That yellow familiar appears.

"Candace, is supper nearly ready?"

"All ready, missis—table set and everything."

"Set the table for two; and, look here! broil some steak—not too rare, mind—just slightly underdone. And make coffee—she prefers coffee. And don't be five minutes about it. Miss Reine is here, and has had no dinner."

Candace disappears. Miss Hariott returns, draws her chair close, and takes both the girl's hands in her own.

"Dear," she softly says, "are you sure there is nothing I can do for you? I want to do something so much. I am very fond of you, my little one. I suppose I was never meant to be a wife, but I surely must have been meant for a mother. If I had a daughter, I do not know I could be fonder of her than I am of you, and I would wish her to be exactly like you. Reine, if you are unhappy at your grandmother's—and I know you are—leave her, and come and live with me. Nothing would make me so happy. I have a thousand things to be thankful for; but I am a woman alone all the same, and I am lonely often enough. Be my daughter, my sister, anything you please. You know I love you, and I think you are a little—just a little—fond of your old maid friend."

"My friend! my friend!" Reine repeats, and leans forward, with filling eyes, to kiss her. "What would my life have been here but for you? Do not say any more to me—my heart is so full I cannot bear it. I wish I might come, but I may not; to-morrow you will know why. And when you hear all, do not think of me too hardly—oh! do not, for, indeed, I am not guilty! Could I speak and betray my brother? It is all very bitter—bitterer than death; but the very worst of it all has been the thought that you may believe what they say, and think me the despicable and guilty creature that they do."

"Is her mind wandering?" thinks Miss Hariott, in dismay. But, no; dark, deep trouble looks at her out of those large, melancholy eyes, but not a delirious mind.

"I do not understand," she says, perplexedly. "What

do you mean by guilt? What is it they accuse you of, and who are 'they?'"

"Ah! I forgot. You do not know, of course. Madame Windsor and M. Longworth."

"Longworth!" cries the other, indignantly. "Do you mean to say Longworth accuses you, believes you guilty of any wrong?"

"Do not blame him," Reine says, wearily. "How can he help it? Everything is against me, and I can say nothing, do nothing. Yes, he believes me guilty, and you like him so well that I fear, I fear he will make you believe me guilty, too."

"If he were an angel, instead of a man, with his full share of man's blind selfishness, I would not believe one word against you. Believe! I would not listen! Have I not eyes, have I not judgment, do I not know you well? I would stake my life on your goodness and truth, though all the gossip of Baymouth stood up with one mouth and condemned you! Oh! Little Queen, my friendship is worth more than that; one word from Longworth will not shake it. I see your ring is gone; can it be possible that all is at an end between you?"

"All!" is the dreary echo.

"Since when has this been? Did it happen to-day?"

"The breaking of our engagement? Oh! no, a week ago, before he went away."

"And I knew nothing of it from either of you! Well! and what was it all about? Is Laurence Longworth going out of his senses?"

"Coming into his senses he might tell you. There is a Spanish proverb, 'A wise man changes his mind—a fool never.' M. Longworth has simply shown himself a wise man, and changed his mind. Do not let us talk of it, madame. I am so weary and heart-sick of it all."

There is a heart-sob in every word. Miss Harriott starts up

"You shall not say one other word, you poor famished child. Oh! what brutes, what blind, stupid idiots even the cleverest and best men can be! To think of Longworth's doubting you——"

"Supper, missis," says Candace, and Miss Hariott seizes her guest and leads her on to the dining-room.

Reine is famished, and does not know it until the fragrance of the coffee and waffles greets her. In the centre of the table the soft drop light burns; meats, sweetmeats, tea and coffee, cakes and pies, Candace's masterpieces, are spread, in tempting array.

"Now," exclaims the hostess, "you are to eat every morsel of this bit of steak, and these fried potatoes. Candace's fried potatoes are things to dream of. And you are to drink two cups of coffee, and by the time that is done you will be a living, breathing being once more. No breakfast, no dinner, no supper! Here, you shall have a toast:

'Here's a health to all those that we love!

Here's a health to all them that love us!

Here's a health to all those that love them that love those that love them that love those that love us!'

A faint laugh rewards this quotation. Hearts may break, but mouths must eat; and Reine really feels the need of food for the first time to-day. Still her performance is eminently unsatisfactory to the giver of the feast, who frowns as she sees her most tempting dainties pushed aside, almost untasted.

"A wilful girl must have her way, but if you want to come off victorious in any struggle of life, the first ingredient is a good appetite. Reine, I wish you would remain with me. That big uncanny house, and the oppressive majesty of its mistress, are killing you by inches. Stay with me to-night at least."

"I cannot, indeed. I am staying longer than I ought

now. Will you pardon me if I say good-night at once. I feel like a new being, strengthened and refreshed since I came here. You always do me good. I cannot say what I feel, but indeed I am most grateful."

"There can be no question of gratitude between those who love, dear child—it is more blessed to give than to receive in such cases. Will you indeed go?"

"I must. I have no choice in the matter. If I had I would stay—oh how gladly—with you forever."

She rises and resumes her hat and jacket. Miss Hariott stands silent, watching her wistfully. She goes with her, still silent, troubled, and perplexed to the door. It is quite dark now, windless and warm, with the weight of coming rain in the air. Here Reine pauses, holds out both hands, and looks up into the face of her friend.

"What shall I say to you, dearest, truest, best friend, of all that is in my heart? I love you, I thank you, and even if in spite of yourself they make you think hardly of me, I will never love you or thank you the less. Good-night and good-by—I like that English word good-by. Good-by, *Mar-raine*."

"But only until to-morrow," Miss Hariott says, in vague doubt and alarm. "Come and spend a long day with me to-morrow, and sing for me your pet song, 'Normandie, ma Normandie!'"

Reine smiles faintly.

"Ah, ma Normandie. 'Je vais revoir, ma Normandie.' It is a long time since I have sung that. Good-by, good-by; it is time I was gone." And then there is a kiss, and a moment later Miss Hariott stands on her door-step alone.

She is puzzled, annoyed, indignant with Longworth and Mrs. Windsor, without quite knowing why. What does it all mean? Some great trouble has surely befallen her little friend. There is a look in her face to-night she has never seen there before. Is it anything connected with Durand?

Has he not gone? She has forgotten to ask. To-morrow she will know all. All what? and where is the girl going in such haste now? Will Longworth call to-night? She hopes so; he will clear up this mystery and she will be able to give him a piece of her mind. Just at present Miss Harriott feels it would be an unspeakable comfort to scold somebody. Dissatisfied, curious, troubled, she shuts the door and goes back to solitude and her cheerful sitting-room.

Reine meantime hurries on. Her way to the station takes her past her church—a pale light glimmers inside, and she turns and goes in. One light only burns, the light of the “everlasting lamp,” and by its tiny ray she sees half a dozen kneeling figures here and there. But no one looks up, all are absorbed, and she glides without noise into a pew, and kneels down. Her prayer is wordless, but none the less eloquent—the cry of a tortured, humbled, agonized heart needs no words. One is there who reads hearts. *Miserere! Miserere!* is the burden of that voiceless cry. All other help is unavailing. He who listens here alone can help, and heal, and have mercy.

In the office of the Baymouth *Phoenix* gas is flaring at five o'clock this dull afternoon, and the tide of business and printing flows on rapidly and ceaselessly. In his room the sub-editor, rather overworked during his chief's absence, is preparing to take an early departure, and moves about putting on hat and coat, singing a cheerful though subdued stave as he does so. This is what Mr. O'Sullivan sings:

“Oh! whistle, daughter, whistle, and you shall have a cow.”

“I never whistled in my life and I can't whistle now.”

“Oh! whistle, daughter, whistle, and you shall have a man.”

“I never whistled in my life—but I'll whistle if I can.”

“It's well to be seen,” says Mr. O'Sullivan, in soliloquy, “it isn't in the present day she lived, or it's the cow she'd have whistled for, not the man. If all I hear be true—and

It's little I know of them except by hearsay—it's more and more mercenary the women are growing. There is Mrs. Beckwith—sure she makes no secret of what she married Beckwith for. There is Mrs. Sheldon, doesn't all the world know she threw Longworth to the dogs for Sheldon because—oh! faith, it's the cow they'd have whistled for, both of them!"

Mr. O'Sullivan sallies forth, goes to dinner, at which meal Mr. Longworth does not appear. After dinner, and a moderate amount of time spent peacefully smoking to aid digestion, the sub-editor of the *Phoenix* starts off for his habitual constitutional—one of the prettiest walks, and that which he most affects is the road that leads to the station. As he draws near the church he espies in the obscurity a figure that has a vaguely familiar air. In a moment he recognizes it—it is Mademoiselle Reine Landelle. Is she going to church at this hour? There is nothing out of the common or surprising to O'Sullivan if she is, he goes himself sometimes. But as the light of the street lamp, burning in front of the building, falls full on her face, he pauses suddenly—its deadly paleness strikes him. Obeying an impulse, he follows her in, takes his place in a pew near the door, where he can watch her, himself unseen.

He sees her kneel, bury her face in her hands, and so remain rigid and motionless a long time. Other people are praying around him, but their attitude is not hers—hers suggests some deep trouble or suffering. Then she rises, and the next moment she has passed the pew where he sits, and is gone.

He gets up and follows her out, still obeying that uncontrollable impulse. It is too late for her to be out alone; the night is dark, the way lonely, and drunken men from North Baymouth are sometimes about.

But she does not turn back to the town. She goes straight on, to his surprise, in the direction of the station. He, too, goes on, with some curiosity in his mind, but with the still

stronger instinct that she is unprotected, and that it is ~~his~~ place, unobserved, to take care of her.

She reaches the station, lighted, and filled with staring loafers. Many eyes turn upon her, and O'Sullivan can see her shrink, and tremble in sudden terror. Instantly he is by her side.

"Mademoiselle," he says, taking off his hat, "can I be of any service to you here? It's not a pleasant place for a lady to be in alone."

She turns to him and catches his arm with a look he never forgets, a look of infinite trust, and welcome, and relief.

"Oh!" she says, "is it you, monsieur? Yes, I want a ticket for New York. I am going away."

For an instant he stands mute with amaze, looking at her. She sees this and answers it, a spasm of pain crossing her color.

"Oh, it seems strange, I know, alone at night, but I cannot help it. Something has happened, something very unpleasant, monsieur, and I must go. Do get the ticket; it is almost time for the train to start."

The perceptive faculties of the man are keen; instantly he knows that she is flying from her grandmother's house to return no more. Instantly, also, his resolve is taken—she shall not go alone.

"Sure, isn't it the most fortunate thing in the world," he says, cheerfully, "that business is taking me up, too, to-night, this very night! It will give me the greatest pleasure in life to be of use to you on the journey, and ye know me long enough, Mademoiselle, and will do me the honor, I'm sure, to command me in any way I can be of service to you. It's proud and happy I'll be if ye'll only trust me just as if ye had known me all my life."

She looks up in his face, and with a sudden, swift emotion lifts his hand to her lips.

The dark, upraised eyes are full of tears; and the tears

and the light touch of the lips move him greatly. They stand by themselves, no one near to wonder or see.

"Monsieur, I think the good God must have sent you to me in my trouble. For I am in trouble, and I trembled at the thought of this night-journey alone. Now I am not afraid; you are with me, and all is well."

"Stay here," O'Sullivan says, "and I will get the tickets. Oh, then," he adds, inwardly, "may the curse of the crows fall on whoever has brought the tears and the trouble to that sweet face! Didn't I ever and always distrust that soft-spoken young Durand—and don't I know that it's some devilment of his that has brought this upon her! Wasn't it the lucky thing all out that I followed her into the chapel this evening!"

He procures two tickets, writes out a brief telegram for the office, to be dispatched next morning: "Called away unexpectedly. Back in a few days." Then he returns to Reine, and has just time to put her in a palace-car before the train starts.

She is very tired. The fatigue of the preceding night, the mental strain, the long fast, have utterly exhausted her. She sinks into one of the large, softly-cushioned chairs, and falls asleep almost instantly.

O'Sullivan sits near, ostensibly reading, but he drops his paper and looks at her in pity and wonder, as she sleeps deeply and quietly, like a spent child. The small, dusk face looks singularly childish in sleep. Now and then a sob catches her breath, as if the sorrows of her waking hours followed her even into dreamland. What is it all about? he wonders. Does Longworth know? O'Sullivan likes his chief, but he has never liked him less than as Reine Landedelle's lover. His strongest feeling, as he sits here near her, is one of intense pleasure and pride that she trusts in him as implicitly as though he were her brother, and that fate has chosen him to befriend her.





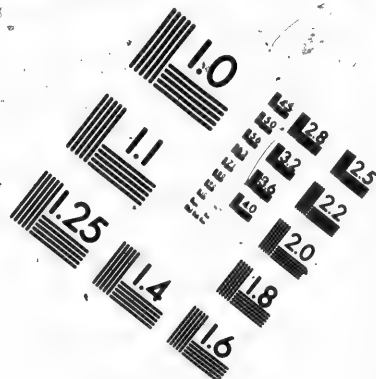
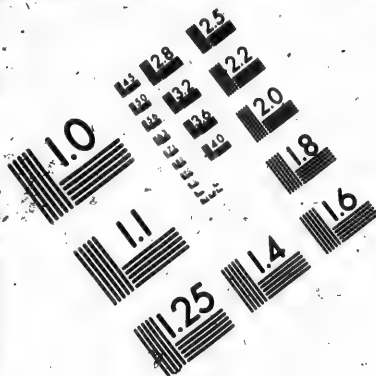
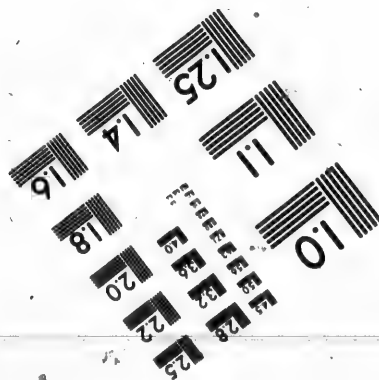
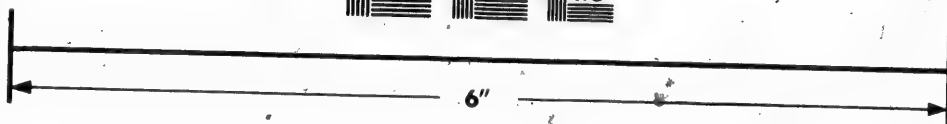
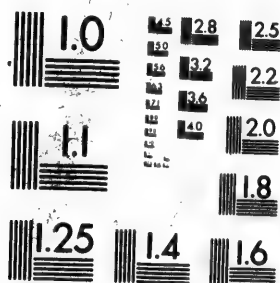


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If nature had added six or seven inches to Mr. O'Sullivan's stature, and shown better taste in the selection of a set of features, this narrative might never have been written. The soul of a knight dwelt in this gentleman's body; his possibilities were infinite, his opportunities few. A woman in distress invariably appealed to his sympathies, no matter how old or ugly that woman might be. In his character of a New York reporter how often had he nearly got his head broken by interfering between quarreling husbands and wives—the wives being generally the first to turn upon the peace-maker. Before beauty in distress, need it be said that risk of limb or life would have been the merest bagatelle? Yes, the possibilities of heroism were strong in the O'Sullivan; but how is a little, whiskerless man, with a rubicund complexion and a turn-up nose, to be heroic? If Sir Galahad had been so blighted, would he ever have set forth in search of the Holy Grail? If Sir Launcelot had been so marred, would all his chivalry and brilliant bravery have given King Arthur ground for the D. C.? The chivalry that is sublime in your tall, your stately, your handsome cavalier, sinks to the ridiculous in a sub-editor of five feet five. The instinct was there, but nature and destiny were alike against it.

"Where is the good of thinking about it?" more than once had thought Mr. O'Sullivan, with an impatient sigh. "If I were wrecked on a desert island with her, like Charles Reade's transcendental *omadhaun*, and we lived there together for twenty years, sure I'd be no nearer her caring for me at the end than at the beginning. She would let me gather the cocoanuts, and fry the fish, and build her a hut, and smile upon me with that beautiful smile of hers every time, and say, 'Merci, monsieur' in that sweet voice—and by the same token it's the sweetest I ever heard at home or abroad; but fall in love with me—oh, faith, no! Still I think the life would be pleasant, and upon me conscience I'd exchange the *Phenix* office for it any day."

Neither by inclination nor constitution was the O'Sullivan a sentimental or romantic man—very much the reverse indeed; but Reine Landelle's dark, lustrous, Norman eyes had got a way somehow of floating before him and disturbing his peace of mind, after a fashion quite without precedent in his experience of ladies' eyes. Was he falling in love? He did not know; his appetite and spirits were not impaired to any serious extent, and these he had always understood were the symptoms; nevertheless, she was something different to him from all the rest of the world. There was a strong bond of friendship between him and Longworth; he admired prodigiously the superior talents of his chief; there were few of life's good gifts he would have grudged him, but when his engagement to Reine was made known, he came very near it. What the feeling was in O'Sullivan's case who is to say? It would have been love, deep and true, strong and tender, in a taller, handsomer, more dignified man.

For Reine—ah, well! Reine liked him cordially, and trusted him implicitly by instinct, and without knowing why. She had always a frank smile of welcome for the good-humored, round-faced, rather elderly young man, whose bald forehead she looked down upon every Sunday from the choir, and who usually walked home with her after service. That he could fall in love with her, that he could fall in love with any one, was a funny idea that never entered her head.

She slept all night. The train flew on, and in his seat O'Sullivan dozed fitfully and at intervals. His profession had rendered night-work of any sort second nature—owls and newspaper men being always at their briskest when the rest of the world virtuously sleeps. It was only when the train went thundering into a station that the hubbub around her fully awoke Reine. She sat up with a startled look to meet the friendly, reassuring face of her companion.

"Where are we?" she asks. "Have I been asleep?"

"We are in New York, and it is a beautiful sleep ye have

had of it all night," replies Mr. O'Sullivan, and rises and proffers his arm. Reine takes it, and steps out into the noisy station still half bewildered.

"This way, ma'amselle—we'll find a hack, and it's lucky we have no trunk to detain us. Is there any particular place?"

"No," Reine says in a distressed voice, "I do not know where to go. Oh, what would I ever have done, monsieur, if I had not met you?"

"Then I'll just take you to a hotel for the present, and when we have had breakfast in comfort and quiet, we'll step out and look about us. If you could only make up your mind to let me know what you mean to do, maybe I could be more useful to you. If it's Mr. Durand ye want to find——"

"No, no," Reine interrupts, "oh, no! I never want to see Léonce again. Monsieur, how very strange all this must seem to you, I know; and you have been so good a friend to me—*Mon Dieu!* how good, that I must tell you why I have run away. For you know I have run away, do you not? No one in the world knows I am here." Oh, I fear, I fear, you must think very badly of me for this."

"Mademoiselle," responds Mr. O'Sullivan, brusquely, "that is nonsense. I could not think badly of you or anything you might do, if I tried. I don't want to know why you have come—I know what it must be like, living with that high and mighty old Juno, your grandmother. I only wonder you have stood it so long. Don't say one word, Ma'amselle Reine; can I not see that it distresses you, and am I not ready to take your word for it, when you say you had to come."

"You are generous," she says, brokenly, and she thinks with a pang how different all might have been if the man who professed to love her had trusted her like this; "but I must tell you Madame Windsor, as you know, always disliked M. Durand."

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"More betoken, some others of us did the same," says,
inwardly, Mr. O'Sullivan.

"The night before last," pursues Reine, still in that agi-
tated voice, "some one—some man forced an entrance into
the house and stole a large sum of money. My grand-
mother suspects and accuses Léonce, she also accuses me
of being his accomplice. She said some very bitter and
cruel things to me—things so bitter and cruel that I can
never forget them. I do not know that I can ever forgive,
and so I came away. I could not stay—I was called a thief
—my father, my dear dead father was called—oh! she was
cruel, cruel, cruel!"

She buries her face in her hands and breaks down for the
first time in a very passion of sobs. O'Sullivan listens in
fiery wrath.

"The old catamaran! the old witch of Endor! Oh! then
may it come back hot and heavy on herself, and may I live
to see it! But, Mademoiselle Reine—sure ye'll pardon me
for naming him—wasn't there Longworth, and as ye are en-
gaged ought you not to have seen him and told him before
you left. He would have taken your part against her——"

He stops as Reine looks up, a flash of scorn drying the
tears in her eyes.

"He take my part!—he my friend! May Heaven defend
me from such friends! Monsieur, he knew, and took sides
with her against me; he believed me to be a liar and a thief.
One day I may learn to forgive her—she is old and preju-
diced, and never liked me; but him—monsieur, I will never
forgive your friend my whole life long."

"Now, by the Lord Harry!" cries O'Sullivan with flash-
ing eyes, "if any one else of all the world had told me this
of Longworth, I couldn't have believed it. Is the man mad
to doubt you? Oh! upon my conscience, this is a burning
shame all out!"

But Reine is growing calm again; the tears are dried, and

the fierce indignation has died in slow sadness out of her eyes.

"No," she says, earnestly, "no, monsieur, you must not quarrel with your friend for me; you must not tell him you know anything of me—why do you laugh?"

"Truly, mademoiselle, that would be a difficult matter. Tell him I know nothing of you! Sure wasn't there twenty if there was one on the platform when we left, and won't it be over the town before noon to-day? The man or woman who will keep a secret in Baymouth will have something to do, upon me faith."

She looks at him in silence, wistful, distressed, perplexed.

"Was it wrong for you to come with me?" she asks.

"Wrong! If it was, I would like somebody to tell me what is right. If I had a sister," says the O'Sullivan, with rather a heightened color, "circumstanced as you were, and obliged to run for it, wouldn't I be proud and thankful if any friend of hers or mine would step to the fore and take charge of her? It's not the things that set the tongues of gossips wagging most that are most wrong—you'll find that out if you live long enough. But this is all a waste of time, and we are close upon the hotel. Just tell me what your plans are, mademoiselle; there isn't an inch of New York I don't know better than my prayers, and there's no telling the service I may be of to you. Is it your intention to remain here?"

"Can I do better, monsieur?" It is a great city, and in a great city it is always easiest to earn one's living, is it not? And I have come to earn my own living."

He looks at her in pity. Earn her own living! So young, so friendless, so ignorant of the world she has come to face and fight! Oh, for the power to win her from them all, to shield her forever from life's care, and struggles, and work! It is a moment before he speaks.

"Your mind is fully made up?" he asks. "You do not intend to return to Baymouth?"

"Never, monsieur. I will die first!"

"Not even if Longworth——"

"Do not name him!" she cries, her eyes lighting passionately. "I never want to hear his name, or see his face as long as I live!"

"I beg your pardon." Yes, it is quite true that up to the present, O'Sullivan has always liked his chief; but the glow that fills his heart as he listens to this outburst against him, is not one of resentment. "Then may I ask what you propose to do?"

"I could teach French," she says, the anxious tone returning, "or German. I could teach vocal or instrumental music. I could be a governess."

Mr. O'Sullivan looks more than doubtful.

"I do not think governesses are greatly in demand in New York, and the market is drugged with male and female teachers of French, and German, and music. And then, under the most favorable circumstances, it takes time to get pupils. I have thought of something——" he pauses, and eyes her doubtfully. "But maybe you may think it derogatory."

"Tell me what it is—do not hesitate. I will do anything, anything that is safe and honest and respectable, for a living."

"I admire your spirit, mademoiselle—it's the sort to get along with; but then, sure, you're proud, if you'll pardon my saying so——"

She smiles faintly.

"I am not proud about work; try me and see. And any plan you propose will be good, I am sure. What is it?"

"Well, then, 'tis this," says Mr. O'Sullivan. "I have a friend. She is a townswoman of my own, and she keeps a millinery establishment on Grand street. It is not a fashionable locality, and she's not a fashionable woman, but a better creature never drew the breath of life. She'd be good to you, and that's what ye want; she'd let you live with her,

and take care of you, and be company for you, and keep you from dying of loneliness in this big city. You could advertise for the pupils if you liked, and meantime you would have a home, a salary, and something to do, and sure that same is a blessing when we're miserable. If you like, ma'amselle, I'll go around and see her after breakfast, and hear what she says."

Reine clasps her hands gratefully.

"Monsieur, it is the very thing. Oh, how kind and thoughtful you are; and what have I done to deserve—how can I ever prove my gratitude?"

"That you trust me is all I ask. Here we are, mademoiselle, and I'm not sorry, for a long night's ride makes a man's appetite mighty painful."

Reine is shown to a room where she can bathe her face and arrange her hair. Then comes breakfast, and as she sits opposite bright Mr. O'Sullivan, she thinks of that last hotel breakfast five months ago, and her heart swells with bitterness and indignation. How cruel, how merciless he has been, how unlike this man who sits beside her.

He has asked her to marry him, but he is ready to distrust her every word, to place the worst construction on her every action. He has refused to believe in her—he has said things to her never to be forgotten or forgiven. And on that night when he had come and cast her off with scorn and insult, she had sat and thought him noble, generous, and good. And he is to all the rest of the world—to her alone he can be harsh, and unjust, and without pity.

Immediately after breakfast Mr. O'Sullivan sallies forth, and rides down to Grand street, to the fashionable establishment of Mrs. M. Murphy. The M. stands for Michael, a good and euphonious baptismal; but Michael has departed, and his relict rather sinks it. Murphy and millinery, taken in conjunction, go badly enough—the "Michael," if forced upon her customers, would damn the business altogether.

"I have come to ask a favor of ye, Mrs. M.," says the O'Sullivan, after the preliminaries of friendly greeting. "I want ye to take an apprentice. She's a French young lady—from Paris all the way, and sure that is an offer ye ought to jump at. 'Mrs. M. Murphy, associated with the elegant and *recherché* young Parisienne, Mademoiselle Reine Landelle,' wouldn't that sound well, now, on the half-yearly circulars? But, then, I forgot, the name mustn't appear. It's a great secret, Mrs. Murphy; she's of one of the very first families in the land, her relations are worth a mint of money; but she has an old witch of a grandmother that a saint couldn't put up with, and the end of it is she has had to run away. She wanted to go and teach French and music—there's not a language, nor an accomplishment going, she hasn't got; but says I to her, 'There's Mrs. Murphy, she's a friend and compatriot of my own, and it's a French young lady of taste and elegance she has been looking for this many a day. It's delighted she'll be to get ye. I'll go to her,' says I, 'this very minute.' And here I am, and such a chance you'll never get again, while your name is Mary Murphy."

"Well, now, but you're the quare man, Mr. O'Sullivan," says Mrs. Murphy, folding her hands across her counter, and looking at him shrewdly, with twinkling eyes. "Is this some devilment ye're up to? I'd not put it past ye. Or is there a young lady in the case? If there is, none of your nonsense now, but tell me all about her."

"May I never, Mrs. Murphy, if it's not the gospel truth," asseverates Mr. O'Sullivan, with earnestness, and thereupon begins and relates, so far as he may, the history of Mlle. Reine Landelle's flight from friends and home. That Mr. O'Sullivan does not unconsciously embellish, we are not prepared to say; is not the judicious embellishing of naked facts his trade? That he narrates dramatically and eloquently, there can be no doubt. Mrs. Murphy's sympathies

are aroused, as a great many interjected "Oh! the crayture!" "See that, now!" "Ah, then the Lord look down on her!" betray.

Mrs. M. Murphy is a lady of tender heart and boundless good nature. She owes Mr. O'Sullivan, as she owns, "many's the good turn," and is well disposed to oblige him. That Mlle. Landelle knows absolutely nothing of the art of millinery is a drawback. "But sure, them French ladies do always have the hoight of taste," is what she adds reflectively. And until mademoiselle has acquired the rudiments, it will not be fair to ask Mrs. Murphy to remunerate her, and immediately a pecuniary transaction passes between the friends, which elicits from the lady the admiring remark:

"Sure, then, Mr. O'Sullivan it's yourself hasn't a stingy bone in your body, and faith, I'll bite my tongue out before I ever drop the laste hint of it. Maybe then 'tis somethin' more than a friend this same young lady is to ye."

"Nothing of the kind, Mrs. M.," says O'Sullivan, hastily. "Don't ever breathe a word like that in her hearing. Mind, she's none of your common sort, but a lady born and bred, and only under a cloud for the present. Take care of her as if she were your own daughter, and I'll never forget your good nature in this as long as I live."

They shake hands across the counter, and he departs. Mrs. Murphy looks after him until he is out of sight.

"It's a better world it would be if there were more of your sort, Mr. O'Sullivan," she soliloquizes. "You're a short man, but may I never, if you haven't a heart the size of a bushel basket."

O'Sullivan returns to Reine, jubilant with success. Mrs. Murphy is only too delighted to receive a French assistant, she will pay her a stipend of eight dollars per week for the present, and more as she becomes proficient in the profession. She has a spare bedroom that will do admirably for the young lady, and she is to go to her new home this very day.

"I know her well," says Mr. O'Sullivan. "No better creature lives." She is neither educated nor polished, but a truer friend and protector—a safer and happier home, you could not find."

"How good you are! how good you are!" is all Reine can say, her heart almost too full of gratitude and thankfulness for words. "I will thank you, I will think of you, I will pray for you always."

Mr. O'Sullivan sighs. Prayers are very good, so are thanks, but they are not quite the return he longs for most. That, however, it is no use thinking of—when we cannot have great, we must learn to be thankful for small mercies.

An hour later, and Reine is taken to Grand street and the broad maternal bosom of Mrs. Murphy.

"When do you return to Baymouth?" she asks, as the O'Sullivan is about to take his departure.

"Not for a few days, I think. I do not often get a holiday, and now that I have taken one I intend to make the most of it. I have more friends and acquaintances in New York than I could hunt up in a month of Sundays. And then I don't want to go until I see you quite settled and content in your new home."

She gives him a grateful look.

"Ah! monsieur, your goodness is too great. When you go back, tell no one where I am or what I am doing. Say to Miss Hariott, when you see her, that I am well and safe, and send her always my dearest love. Marie I will write to—and for the rest, I have no friend."

"I will do everything you say, mademoiselle," he answers quietly, and departs.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MARIE SPEAKS.

AT the window of a private-parlor of a Boston hotel, Mlle. Marie Landelle sits gazing out at the throng passing and repassing uninterruptedly up and down Tremont street. She is dressed in white, her abundant yellow-red hair falls in a crimped glistening shower to her slender waist. She looks fair enough, lovely enough, serene enough for some white Greuze goddess, as she sits. So thinks Frank Dexter, coming hastily in with a bundle of papers and letters, pausing in the doorway to gaze and admire.

See her as often as he may, her fresh, fair loveliness comes ever upon him as a surprise. At a little distance Mrs. Dexter reclines on a lounge, half asleep.

The yachting trip has been incontinently cut short by the sea sickness of Miss Landelle. On the second day out she declared pathetically she must be brought back, or die. The trip to Georgia by sea was therefore given up, to Frank's profound regret; but whether by sea or land, so long as Marie was his traveling companion, earth was Elysium, and she the most beautiful mortal in it.

"Letters, Frank?" says Mrs. Dexter, rising on her elbow. "Any for me, my dear?"

"One from Baymouth, from Miss Hariott, I opine. None for you, Miss Marie. A paper for me, in Totty Sheldon's writing—a *Phenix*, I suppose. As if any one safely out of Baymouth ever cared to hear of it again."

"I care a great deal," says Marie, with one of her faint smiles. "Read us the *Phenix* news, Mr. Frank."

"With pleasure," says Frank, briskly, and takes a seat near, tears off the wrapper and opens the sheet. "Yes, a *Phenix*; and what is this marked in characters of blood?"

"Blood!" repeats Miss Landelle, startled.

"Well, red ink, then. What! listen to this, mademoiselle; listen to this, *madre mio*. 'Dastardly House-Breaking—A Bold Burglary!'—they spare no capitals in the *Phenix* office—'The Mansion of Mrs. Windsor Broken into and Robbed! By Jove!'"

Marie starts upright with a faint cry. Mrs. Dexter, also with a startled look, glances up from her letter. Frank excitedly reads on.

"One of the boldest and most daring outrages ever perpetrated in our usually peaceful and law-abiding town, was last night committed. The mansion of the well known and most esteemed lady, Mrs. Windsor, was feloniously broken into at the hour of two this morning, and robbed of nearly two thousand dollars.

"The money had only been paid Mrs Windsor on the preceding evening, and how the burglar had obtained his knowledge of its whereabouts remains a mystery. An open back window showed how he entered and escaped.

"His entrance aroused Mrs. Windsor from slumber, when, with a daring brutality which shows he came prepared for any emergency, he immediately applied a sponge saturated with chloroform to her nostrils and stupefied her. He then secured his booty and fled.

"Suspicion has fallen upon a certain young foreigner, who of late has been creating somewhat of a sensation in our quiet town, as on the morning following the robbery he absconded by the earliest train, and has not since been heard of. It is hoped our police will use every vigilance in pursuing the perpetrator of this audacious robbery and bring him to summary justice."

The paper drops from Frank's hand in dismay. He looks

at Marie and sees her sitting in her chair, white as ashes, staring at him in stony silence while he reads.

"This is horrible!" he says, in an agitated voice; "there must be some strange mistake. They can't mean Durand."

"Oh! dear me," says Mrs. Dexter, sitting suddenly upright, and gazing at her letter; "this is most distressing. I must read you this, my dear Miss Landelle, for she tells me so, and it is really quite shocking. Listen:

"BAYMOUTH, Oct. 10th.

"MY DEAR MRS. DEXTER: I write to you in the utmost distress and anxiety, in the hope that you may receive this before your departure for the South. I fear Miss Landelle must return immediately instead of accompanying you, as you mentioned she intended to do. Many surprising and most painful things have occurred here during the past three days. In the first place, Mrs. Windsor's house has been broken into, and she has been robbed—by whom is not positively known, but rumor through the town says M. Léonce Durand. This is certain—he left Baymouth very early on the morning following the theft, and has not since returned. The police are at present on his track. Mrs. Windsor, tyrannical and unjust as usual, accused Mlle. Reine of being accessory to the fact, in language so violent that the poor child was obliged to leave her house forever. She departed late at night. She was seen at the station in company with Mr. O'Sullivan. Mr. O'Sullivan took two tickets for New York, and traveled with her. He has not yet returned to throw light upon the affair, and as a matter of course, all Baymouth is loudly talking. But even Baymouth, noted for its evil gossip, talks no scandal of Reine's departure with this gentleman. He is one of the exceptionable people who do things with impunity it would be ruin for any one else to attempt. He has undertaken his share in it to befriend her—that seems to be tacitly understood—as he has often befriended others. Reine is doubtless in New York, and does not intend to return. All this you had best tell her sister, and let her return if she sees fit. I say nothing of my own feelings, although, loving Reine as I do, you can hardly doubt I feel it deeply. Hoping this will reach you in time, I remain, my dear Mrs. Dexter,

Yours faithfully,

"HESTER HARIOTT."

There was a brief silence of consternation. Mother and son look at each other, perplexed and distressed. Marie has

white as ashes, started voice ; "there 't mean Durand." ting suddenly up- most distressing. I e, for she tells me :

MOUETH, Oct. 10th.
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fallen back in her chair with one faint, sobbing cry, and does not stir or look up. She is a girl of strong will and resolute character, but she is moved now as few have ever seen her moved. No one knows what to say. Frank looks unutterably miserable—his mother unutterably helpless.

Marie lifts her face at last ; she is scarcely whiter than usual. She is not crying, but there is an expression in her eyes that frightens Frank.

"I must start for Baymouth by the next train. Will you kindly see to everything, Mr. Frank ? I must not lose a moment. If I had been there this would never have happened."

They do not understand her, but they ask no questions. She scarcely speaks another word to either. She goes to her room, and has on her hat and traveling dress when Frank comes to tell her they may start. The journey will be but a few hours. They will reach Baymouth a little after dark.

Frank goes with her. She hardly speaks the whole way, except to give brief answers to his anxious inquiries about her comfort. She sits erect, looking perfectly colorless, but a determined expression setting the lips and hardening the brown, steadfast eyes. He has often noticed that peculiar look of self-will and resolution around Marie Landelle's mouth and chin—it has given character to the whole face ; but he has never seen it so strongly marked as now.

They reach Baymouth. The October night, chill and starry, has fallen—lights gleam from the great range of the Windsor Mills. As Frank is about to give the order to the Stone House, she abruptly checks him.

"No, not there," she says. "Mr. Dexter, where am I most likely to see your cousin, Mr. Longworth, at this hour ? At his office or at his boarding-house ?"

"It is nearly eight," Frank returns, looking at his watch. "Not at his boarding-house certainly ; he rarely spends his evenings there. Either at the office, at Miss Hariott's, or at the Stone House."

"Let us try the office first," she says, and the young man gives the order and they are driven to the *Phenix* building. It too is in a state of immense illumination. Dexter gets out, goes in, and returns almost immediately.

"Longworth is here, Mlle. Marie; I will take you up to his room."

She pulls the vail she wears over her face, and follows Frank up a long flight of stairs and into the room sacred to O'Sullivan. Frank taps at another door and Longworth's voice calls come in.

"It is I, Larry," he says, and Longworth turns round from his writing and looks at him. "Miss Landelle is here—has just arrived and wishes to see you. Mademoiselle, I will wait for you in the hack."

She puts back her vail and advances.

Longworth rises, something of surprise, something of sternness, a great deal of coldness in his manner. He is unconscious of it. If he has thought of the elder sister at all, it is to be sorry for her, and yet the deep anger and resentment he feels shows itself in his manner even to her.

"Sit down," he says, and places a chair. "I suppose Miss Hariott's letter reached Mrs. Dexter, and that is why you are here. She told me she had written. It is rather a pity your pleasure trip should be cut short by these untoward events."

There is a touch of sarcasm in his tone. He is character reader enough to know that Miss Marie Landelle has a tolerably strong share of selfishness, and will feel any misfortune that touches her own comfort, keenly. But she feels this far more than he is disposed to give her credit for.

"Mr. Longworth," she says earnestly, "why has Reine gone?"

"Miss Landelle, need you ask? Did not Miss Hariott write explicitly enough? Because Monsieur committed the robbery, and she was present at the time?"

"Present at the time? Do you mean to say Reine aided him in robbing Madame Windsor?"

"Mademoiselle, these questions are very painful. You oblige me to tell the truth. Yes."

"My grandmother believes this?"

"She does."

"You believe this, Mr. Longworth?"

"I have no alternative, Miss Landelle."

She is still for a while, silently looking at him as if trying to read him as she sits there, impassive, inflexible, coldly stern before her.

"Monsieur," she says, leaning a little forward, the flood of gas-light falling on her beautiful, colorless face, "will you answer me a question? You asked my sister to marry you—did you love her the least in the world?"

"I decline to answer that question, Miss Landelle."

"You need not," she says, contemptuously; "you could not love any one. But surely, without love, you might have trusted her. What had she done to be thought a thief?"

"Perhaps you will inquire next, mademoiselle, by what right we stigmatize your friend and hers by that opprobrious epithet—why we dare brand Durand as a robber?"

"No," she says, sudden profound emotion in her tone; "no, I know too well what was his motive and temptation. But that you should doubt Reine—believe her guilty of crime—yes, that indeed bewilders me. How could any one look in her face and believe her guilty of any wrong?"

"Mademoiselle, we learn as we grow older 'how fair an outside falsehood hath;' your sister stands condemned out of her own mouth."

"What did she confess?"

"By her silence, by her refusal and inability to answer the questions that she was with him when he committed this robbery."

Marie still sits and looks at him, a touch of scorn in her face that reminds him of Reine.

"But surely, monsieur, a thief would not stick at a lie. If she could steal, or aid a thief, she could tell falsehoods to screen her crime. And yet you say she preferred standing silent to speaking falsely."

"I do not pretend to understand a lady's motives," Longworth says, impatiently; "at least she would not betray her lover."

"Reine would betray no one. She was true as truth itself—who should know better than I? But monsieur, pardon my curiosity; why do you say her lover?"

"Her husband, then, if you prefer it. Her secret of course is no secret to you."

He says it with a passionate gesture that shows her the pain this self-repressed man is suffering, in spite of him. She listens, and watches him, and a light breaks slowly over her face.

"His wife!" she repeats, "Reine the wife of Léonce! Oh! *Mon Dieu!* what a strange idea! Monsieur, I beg of you, tell me why you think this? Surely she has never said anything that could make you think so extraordinary a thing. For the whole world Reine would not tell a falsehood."

"And this would be a falsehood?"

"The falsest of all falsehoods."

"And yet I heard his own lips proclaim it, heard him call her his wife. I charged her with it and she did not deny."

"She did not! Oh! my sister, even I have not known half your goodness. Mr. Longworth, there is a terrible mistake here which I alone can clear. Tell me the exact words, if you remember them, that Léonce spoke—for indeed I cannot understand how he ever could have called her his wife."

"I remember them well," Longworth sternly answers.

"they were words not easily forgotten. It was the night of the theatricals—you remember it—the place Miss Hariott's garden. He was excited that night—you probably remember that also, for I saw you were annoyed—and consequently off guard. The words were these—'I will not go. I had the right to come, I have the right to stay. I will not go and leave my wife to be made love to by another man.' Could anything be plainer?"

"And you heard no more—not Reine's reply?"

"I heard no more; I wished to hear no more. The following evening I sought out your sister, upbraided her with her falsity, and told her what I had heard."

"And she?" Marie asks, clasping her hands, "what said she?"

"Not one word. Let me do your sister this justice, mademoiselle: when she is found out she never attempts futile vindication. She accepts discovery and does not add to treachery by lies."

"Oh!" Marie says, bitterly, "you are indeed without pity or mercy—you are indeed a stern and cruel man. My little one! my little one! what have I not made you suffer—what shame, what pain, what humiliation. And Léonce too! Ah, Reine has paid dearly for the keeping of a secret."

"Secrets are like firebrands, mademoiselle, we can't expect to carry them about and go unscorched. But in your commiseration for your sister, are you not talking a little wildly, Miss Landelle? If a wife weaves her little plot to win an inheritance, and fools men into making her offers of marriage——"

"Monsieur, be silent! You have said enough. Reine Landelle is no man's wife; she is pure, and true, and innocent of all wrong as an angel."

He regards her frowning; doubt, anger, distrust in his face. "What do you mean? Am I not to believe what my own ears hear, what my own eyes see?"

"If your ears tell you she is false—no! if your eyes that she is not what she claims to be—no! a hundred times no! I tell you she is no man's wife, and I think she has reason to rejoice she will never be yours."

"Enough of this mystery!" Longworth exclaims, rising in angry impatience. "Speak out the whole truth, or do not speak at all. Where then—who then, is the wife Durand spoke of?"

"She is here! I am Léonce Durand's most wretched wife!"

"You!" he stands stunned; he looks at her in blank silence. "*You / Mademoiselle Marie.*"

"I am not Mademoiselle Marie—I have deceived you all. I own it now, when it is too late. I came to this place Léonce Durand's wife, and, as you say, for the sake of an inheritance, denied it."

He sits suddenly down. His face still keeps that stunned look of utter amaze, but with it mingles a flush of swift, half incredulous hope.

"If you only say this," he begins, "to vindicate your sister —"

"Bah! that is not like your customary sound sense, Mr. Longworth. Am I likely to do that? Reine is of the kind to make sacrifices, to be faithful to death through all things—not I. You are glad that I have told you this—yes, I see you are, and when all is explained, and you can doubt no longer, you will cease to doubt. You will even be ready to forgive her for having been falsely accused and condemned, and condescend to take her back. But, monsieur, if I know my sister, she will not come back. Faith ceases to be a virtue where all is open and clear. If you believe in her, and trust her, because doubt has become impossible, where is your merit as a lover and a friend? Reine will not return to you. She is proud, and you have humbled her to the very dust. In spite of you, I can see that you love her, and will

lament her, and I am glad of it. Yes! monsieur, I say it to your face—I am glad of it. You do not deserve her, you never did. She is an angel of goodness, and fidelity, and truth—and you are—what are you, Monsieur Longworth? What is the man who accuses and hunts down a helpless girl—the girl he has asked to be his wife? Do you suffer? Well, I am glad of that too; you deserve to suffer. Listen, and I will tell you all the truth—the truth which Reine knew, and which she might have told, and so saved herself. But she would not, for a promise bound her. She loved me and Léonce, and was true to us. Listen here!”

It is evident Marie can speak when she chooses, habitually silent as she is. All her languor, all her indolent grace of manner are swept away, and her words flow forth in a stemless torrent. Deep excitement burns in her steadfast eyes, her hands are tightly clasped in her lap, two spots of color gleam feverishly on her cheeks.

For Longworth, he sits mute and stricken, like a man who listens to his own sentence of doom.

“You know this much of our history, Mr. Longworth; that I lived with my father in London, and Reine went when a child to our Aunt Denise Durand in Rouen. She and Léonce grew up together, she loving him with an innocent, admiring, sisterly affection. He, at the age of seventeen, taking it into his foolish boy’s head that he was in love with her. It was nonsense, of course, and she laughed at him, and in a fit of pique he left home and came over to pay his first visit to us, to my father.”

She pauses for a moment with a wistful, saddened look, as if the memory of that first meeting arose before her reproachfully.

For Longworth, there comes to him another memory—the memory of the scene by the garden wall, where he asked Reine that imperious question, “Was Durand ever your lover?” And the low, earnest voice that answered, and that

he refused to believe: "It was only farcy—he was but a boy—he was too young to be any one's lover."

Even then she had been true as truth; and he—well, he had always heard whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad. The madness of coming destruction must have been upon him; he can understand his besotted folly in no other way.

"I am not going into details in this story I am forced to tell you," Marie goes slowly on. "Léonce's visit lasted all that winter, and when he returned to Rouen he was my lover, not poor Petite's. It was our first meeting, for though I had visited Rouen once or twice, Léonce had always been absent. We did not meet very often after that, but we corresponded regularly. I liked him always. I was never a very romantic girl, but his handsome face won my fancy from the first, and no one has ever supplanted him to this day.

"Well, our lives and years went on. Aunt Denise wished Léonce to become a lawyer, but dry studies were never to his taste. He had a voice and a face that all the world told him might make a fortune, and he was ready enough to believe the pleasant flattery. He went to Paris and studied for the operatic stage; he urged Reine to study likewise for the same profession. And, as you know, for a time she did. He made his first appearance and was successful. But success spoils some natures. Léonce in its sunshine developed traits that nearly broke his mother's heart. He became by slow degrees, but surely, a gambler, until at last he almost entirely gave up the stage for the table of the croupier. He was always at Baden, and Homburg, and Monaco—when he was not, he was in London with us. My Aunt Denise knew it, Reine knew it—the fact of his gambling, I mean; but they loved him, and hoped for him, and held their peace. Neither my father nor I knew anything of it; it is all I can say in my own defence. His pockets were always full of money, he was invariably dressed in the most elegant fashion

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and we thought he made all his money in his profession. We were engaged, but secretly. Papa was ambitious for me, and thought I might do better than marry a mere singer, and we felt instinctively that neither Aunt Denise nor Reine would approve. So we met often and held our peace and were quite happy, but there was one drawback—Léonce was inclined to be jealous.

"Our house was well filled with artists of all kinds, and men of a much higher social grade. And I—well, monsieur, I did not appear often, but I was held as a sort of belle, made much of accordingly, and Léonce grew at times moodily jealous. He never had any cause, that I will say; I cared for him only, and he knew it. Still the jealousy was there, and we quarreled and parted, and met again and made up, after the usual foolish fashion of lovers.

"Then came the time when Aunt Denise died, and the war began. Léonce went away among the first, and I learned at last in misery and sickening fear, how dear he was to me, and how miserable I would be without him. Months passed, and although he was a prisoner he was safe and well, and I resolved with my whole heart that when we met again he should have no grounds for jealousy from me, that I would be all the most exacting lover would require. Before he came, the last great and sad change in the lives of Reine and myself had taken place—our father died. And dying, his wish was that we should come here. It was the duty of our mother's mother, he said, to provide for her granddaughters. I thought so too. My life had been one of poverty and work. I longed for a life of luxury and ease. It was my right to have it, since my grandmother was so wealthy a woman. Stern and hard she might be—how stern and hard, poor ailing mamma often told us. But I did not fear; the stake was worth the venture. We would go, and surely, for my shame she would not turn her daughter's children from the door.

"You see, I did not do justice to Madame Windsor's

strength of character. But for you, Mr. Longworth, she would have done even that. I had written a letter of farewell to Léonce, and we had made all our preparations for departure, when he suddenly appeared.

"He opposed my determination by every argument and entreaty he could urge. Wealth was very well, but there were things in the world better than wealth. Forcing ourselves, as we were about to do, upon a relative who scorned and despised us, what could we expect but a life of misery?

"Reine joined him; her repugnance to the project was invincible from the first. But my resolution—my obstinacy, Léonce called it—was not to be shaken, and he grew so passionately excited and enraged at my persistence, that to appease him, I promised to grant the desire of his heart and marry him secretly before I left London.

"He had urged it before, but I never would listen. I liked my lover, but I disliked the thought of a husband with power to control and command me. Still I knew Léonce well enough in his jealous temper, to be very sure that this was the only way to prevent his accompanying us across the ocean, and ruining all our plans. I made two stipulations: the first, that Reine should not know until I saw fit to tell her; the second—a solemn one—this, that no matter how long we should be obliged to stay apart, he would not follow us, but would trust me, and be content to know that I was bound to him irrevocably, and wait.

"He pledged himself to both; he would have pledged himself to anything to make me his wife. We were married on the day we left London for Liverpool. I went out early in the morning and was quietly married, unknown to Reine. He returned with me home, saw after our luggage, drove with us to the station; and we both shook hands with him there, and so parted. He pleaded to accompany us to Liverpool, but I would not consent.

"The captain of the *Hesperia* was my father's friend; for

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my father's sake he promised to meet us at the Liverpool terminus, and take charge of us until we landed at New York.

"And now, monsieur, I come to Reine's share in my most unfortunate secret. On the day but one before we landed, I confessed to her all, my secret marriage and Léonce's promise. She listened in wonder and the deepest regret."

" 'Marie,' she said, 'he will not keep his word. He is as unstable as water. When you least think it, he will grow tired waiting, follow you, and overthrow all your plans. I know him well ; neither promise nor principle will bind him where his love and jealousy stand in the way.'

"She said truly ; she did know him well. Then she in turn became confidential, and told me he was a confirmed gambler.

" 'If I had only told you before,' she said, with deepest regret and self-reproach, 'this fatal marriage might never have taken place ; but Léonce is so dear to me, that even to you I hated to speak of his faults. If I had only dreamed of this I might have saved you.'

"But regrets were too late. I looked forward, too, with hope ; if all turned out as I believed, and our grandmother made us her heiresses, the temptation to gamble would be removed. As the husband of a rich wife, gambling hells would surely offer no attraction. I bound Reine to secrecy, and how well she has kept my secret, at what cost to herself, you, Mr. Longworth, know.

"We landed ; of that, and our coming here, you know all. On that very first evening, Madame Windsor coldly and sternly informed us that you were her heir, that our being allowed to come to her house at all was your doing. You may imagine how pleasant such intelligence was to us both, to me chiefly, although Reine resented it most bitterly. Still I did not despair ; we were here, that was a great point gained. I felt grateful to you for what you had done. It

would go hard with me I thought, if I could not induce our grandmother eventually to change her mind, and alter that unjust will. Then, monsieur, arose our second dilemma—you wished to marry one of us. We were ordered peremptorily to accept, when you saw fit to propose, under pain of immediate expulsion. Reine was brave for herself, but she trembled for me. She loves me, monsieur, as few sisters love. Can you wonder we both hoped she, not I, would be the one selected. From the first almost, I felt sure of it. I could see she attracted you in spite of yourself. Her very hauteur and dislike of you seemed to draw you on. That dislike at the first was very sincere, but she was too just of judgment and generous of heart for it to last. It faded little by little, and something else came in its place. When you did speak, Mt. Longworth, when you did ask her to be your wife, she could say yes with a readiness that I think surprised even herself."

Longworth lies back in his chair, his arms folded, his brows knit, his eyes fixed, at first sternly on her face, fixed now moodily on the floor. He can recall that night and understand for the first time the words that surprised him then:

"Since it had to be one of us I am glad I am the one."

She was too innocently frank even to hide that. The admission was not, as he had flattered himself, because she cared for him more than she knew, but because exposure and expulsion would have followed his choice of Marie.

"You asked her to marry you; she consented," pursues Marie, "and all went well. I am not here to betray my sister. You do not deserve to see it; but you are man enough, and vain enough, to know well she was learning to care for you, to honor you, to trust in you, to be proud of you with all her warm, generous heart."

"Then came Léonce, and from the first moment he appeared you know how well you requited that trust. You

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doubted her from the instant you saw him. She told you he
was her brother. Did you believe her? Why, on that very
first day, you taxed her with falsity on the way home—deny
it if you can! She confessed nothing to me; no, you had
become more to her than her own sister; she confessed
nothing, but I could read her trouble in her face.

"You took the ring off her finger—you remember that ring
with its motto: 'Silent and true.' Yes, I see you do—and
held it as the token of her broken faith to you. Monsieur,
Léonce bought that ring for me, as a sort of pledge of his
own fidelity, I suppose, and when I flung it from me in scorn
and anger, she picked it up and wore it home, thinking no
evil. He had broken his promise to me and I was not to be
appeased. I refused to hear him, I refused to see him, I
refused to accept his ring, to reply to his letters. He threat-
ened to betray me to Madame Windsor. I bade him do so,
and told him quietly that never while I lived would I see or
speak to him after. He knew me well enough to be very
sure I would keep my word, and that certainty alone held
him silent.

"I defied him, and went on my way heedless of him, all
the love I ever felt seeming to die out in the intensity of my
contempt. And Reine trying to be true to us both, loving
us both, suffered daily, hourly misery. Hating secrets with
her whole heart, she yet had to bear the brunt of ours. You
suspected her, and never spared her—that, too, she had to
bear. She was forced to meet Léonce in my stead, to
answer his letters, to keep him quiet. But why go on?
What you heard that night in Miss Hariott's garden you can
understand now. I was the wife he meant—Mr. Dexter, I
presume, the lover he referred to. That Reine bore your
taunts—and I am sure you can be very merciless, monsieur
—in silence, is but an added proof of her heroic fidelity. I
was gone. I had fled in my selfish cruelty to escape for a
little from Léonce.

"That, I suppose, was the last drop in his cup of bitterness and jealousy. His money was gone, he desired to follow and wreak what vengeance I cannot tell; and reckless and desperate entered Madame Windsor's house and stole her money. Reine may have discovered him, I do not know. It may very easily have been so. While his crime broke her heart, was she likely to betray the brother she loved? Oh! my little sister, my Reine, my Reine! what you must have endured standing before your pitiless judges and cast off with scorn and insult! In night and stealth, like a guilty creature, she had to fly and the good God only knows what is her fate. Oh! *Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!* it breaks my heart only to think of it."

She covers her face with her hands and weeps passionately aloud. Longworth starts to his feet, goaded by her tears and reproaches, by the far more maddening reproaches of his own heart, almost beyond endurance.

"For Heaven's sake, stop!" he says, hoarsely, "I cannot stand this! I have been a d——d fool, and you have been from the first to the last one of the most utterly selfish and heartless women that ever drew breath!"

"I know it! I know it!" she says between her sobs; "no need to tell me that. In blaming you I do not spare myself, but what will all our self-reproach avail to help her whose heart we have broken."

He walks up and down the room. His face is startlingly pale, his eyes are full of remorse, and pain, and shame, but his habitual self-control does not desert him. He stops at last, suddenly, before her.

"What do you mean to do?" he coldly asks.

She lifts her head and faces him. Her tears have ceased, she looks composed and resolute once more.

"To go from here to my grandmother, and confess to her what I have confessed to you."

"What good will that do?" he demands almost roughly;

"by bringing ruin on yourself will you remove ruin from her? is it what she would counsel you to, do you think, if she were here?"

"No, ah, no! She did not know what selfishness meant. She would tell me to be silent, since by speaking I could not help her."

"Then do as she would have you do. You have thought of yourself long enough—think of others a little now. If you are thrust out homeless and penniless, will it add to your sister's happiness? Greater evil cannot befall her than has already, unless you too are spurned and cast adrift."

"As I may be in any case," Marie says, sadly.

"No, I do not think so. I have seen Mrs. Windsor; she bears you no malice. You played your part so well that you deceived even her sharp eyes. She gives you credit for detesting Durand. She is prepared to overlook your being the sister of Reine, and the connection of a robber. You were always her favorite, as you are doubtless aware; for your own comfort you need fear nothing."

"Mr. Longworth, you appear to relish the saying of bitter things. I am not quite so craven as you think me. I am ready to speak and take the penalty. At least I can remove the stigma from my sister's name."

"Can you? Permit me to doubt it. You may add it to your own, but remove it from hers—that is not so easy. No, mademoiselle, there is nothing for it but to accept destiny as it stands. Your sister has kept your secret, and paid the price to the last farthing. All you can do now is not to add to her distress. All you can do is to go home and enjoy the comfort of Mrs. Windsor's eminently comfortable house, and bear what your conscience may say to you, with what equanimity you can. Your story is safe with me. I will take the liberty of informing Mrs. Windsor and Miss Harriott that I am convinced of Mademoiselle Reine's truth and innocence—beyond this I will not go."

"She rises silently. He holds the door open and they go down stairs. Frank is impatiently kicking his heels in the chill darkness; the hack still waits, and Mr. Dexter springs forward with alacrity and hands her in. Longworth stands bareheaded, the light of the carriage lamps falling on his face, and as Frank looks at him he stares.

"Good gracious, Larry, what is the matter? You look like a sheeted ghost, old boy. What is it—liver—bile—too many hot buckwheats for breakfast, or too much ink and paper all day—hey?"

Longworth shakes him off impatiently.

"Don't be a fool, Dexter. Tell Mrs. Windsor I will call upon her to-morrow," he says to Marie.

Then Frank jumps in beside her, the carriage rolls away and Longworth is left standing in the darkness alone.

CHAPTER XXIX.

O'SULLIVAN SPEAKS.

MR. FRANK DEXTER, during the three-quarters of an hour or so that he stands waiting outside the *Phenix* building, has time for rumination, and this rumination is not of an agreeable character. The events of the afternoon have transpired in such rapid succession, as after a manner to take his breath away, and leave no feeling very clear, except one of puzzled disapprobation.

But now he has time and opportunity to think. Has Durand really robbed Mrs. Windsor, and has Reine been forced to fly as his accomplice in guilt? That she is his accomplice, Frank never for a second imagines—that even Durand should have been capable of so low a crime staggers him. He does not like the fellow, he never has, but still Durand

has the culture, the manners, and the instincts of a gentleman. There must be some mistake—a gambler he may be, a burglar surely not.

And yet why that look of white consternation on Marie's face, if she thinks him innocent? And what does she want of Longworth? Why go to him before going to her grandmother? What are they talking of now? He looks up with a frown at the lighted windows. Why does she prefer consulting and confiding in Longworth to confiding in him? He has ceased to be jealous of his cousin. Longworth's indifference to Marie and her beauty, ever since the first few days, has been patent to all the world. Then there is the trip South; he has made certain of that, and now his best laid plans are going "aglee," and Georgia seems farther off than ever.

Confound Durand! If he wanted to commit robbery why could he not have waited another week? By that time they would have been at the family homestead; he would have put his fate to the touch and won or lost all.

He walks up and down, irritated and impatient, pulling out his watch every few minutes to frown at the slow moments. How long they are—the affairs of the nation might have been settled in half the time. What can she be saying to Longworth? He has worked himself into a fever of petulance, when at last they appear, and the sight of his cousin's face, almost livid in the gas-light, startles him. He speaks once or twice during the short drive to the Stone House. It is doubtful if she hears, it is certain she does not answer. But as the carriage stops before the gloomy garden and still more gloomy house, she leans forward and lays one hand on his arm.

"Mr. Dexter," she says, a slight tremor in her voice, "I have a favor to ask of you. It is this: Do not come here any more."

"Miss Landelle——"

"You are going South with your mother," she says, quick.

ly; "to-morrow is the day you were to start. As a favor to me, Mr. Frank, leave here to-morrow by the early train, and go with Madame Dexter, as you had proposed. I know that she is anxious to get home; do not disappoint her. As a favor to me, Monsieur Frank."

"There are few favors I could think of refusing you, mademoiselle—will you pardon me if I beg you not to insist upon this? There is something I must say to you." Frank hurries on, in an agitated voice, "which I meant to say when you had seen my uncle and my home. But perhaps you will still come——"

"No," she interrupts, "I will never go now. I ought never to have thought of going at all. Oh, how much misery it might have saved if I had not."

"Then I cannot leave to-morrow," Frank says, decisively. "Before we part, I must speak and you must answer. You know—you must know, why I have spent this summer here, when duty so often called me away. I shall not leave Baymouth again until I know when and how, if ever, I am to return."

There is a firmness in the young man's tone, in his face, which even in the obscurity she recognizes. She makes a gesture as though she would ring her hands.

"Oh!" she says under her breath, despair in her voice. "This too must be met and borne. This too I have deserved. Mr. Dexter!" she cries, and clasps her hands and looks at him, "I have not been just or generous with you—I ask you to be both with me. Go away and say nothing. Oh, believe me it will be better—and do not come back. I have no right to ask this—to ask anything; but you have always been kind and a friend to me. Show yourself a friend to the last—go to-morrow and let us see each other no more."

He leans a little forward to look in her face. His own is perfectly pale—his eyes are full of dark, swift terror. The hack is standing still at the iron gate. The driver is stoic.

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cally at his horses' heads, wondering what his fares can be about.

"Does this mean," he says, "that you answer before I ask?—that you anticipate my question and refuse? Does it mean that when I ask you to be my wife you will say no?"

"On!" she says, and shrinks from him as though he had struck her, "I asked you to be generous, and this—this is what you say."

"If generosity means silence, then you certainly have no right to ask it," Dexter responds, that ring of new-born manliness and resolution in his tone; "and I certainly shall not comply. I have spent this summer here because you were here, and I could not go. You know that well. From the first moment I stood and looked at you in Mrs. Windsor's parlor my whole life was shaped so far as a woman can make or mar a man. This too you know. I do not say you have encouraged me. I only know you have been most kind—fatally kind, if you really mean the cruel words you have just spoken. I have not been presumptuous or premature; I hoped, but I also feared; I have given you time. But there is a limit to all things. I can wait no longer. I must know whether I am to hope or despair, and that before we part to-night."

The words come in one impetuous outbreak—there is more in his heart a thousand times than he ever can utter. All his life seems to hang in the balance; a word from her is to turn the scale. The incongruity of time and place never strikes him—an outburst of love in a hack, smelling of stables, and moldy cushions, and a prosaic cabby stamping about the horses' heads to keep himself warm while he waits.

Marie sits quite still, her fingers locked tightly in her lap; a look of mute misery on her face,

"I am a wretch!" she says, "a selfish, heartless wretch. Your cousin said so, and he was right. Through me his life

has been spoiled, shame and suffering have fallen on my sister. And now you—you accuse me of encouraging you, and leading you on ; and perhaps you are right. But I did not mean to do it—I did not think at all. Do I ever think of any one but myself? It was pleasant, and I liked it, I liked you, and so I drifted on, and never cared whether you were hurt or not. If you knew me as I am, you would despise me—you would turn from me with contempt—you would ask the vilest woman in this town to be your wife sooner than me.”

“Will you be my wife?” he steadily repeats.

“No, never! Ah, heaven! it is a crime to sit and hear you say such words at all!”

“Think again,” he says. “You refuse now — I do not know why, but one day——”

“Never, I tell you!” she cries out; “never! never! It is impossible. Monsieur Frank, if you have any mercy or pity for me, let us part here. Do not say one more word. I thought to spare myself, but to-morrow I will write to you and tell you all. What right have I to be spared? And when you know you will hate me and scorn me, but not one tithe as much as I will scorn myself. I have done wrong to many since I came here, but I have done most wrong of all to you.”

She opens the carriage door and descends. He follows her in gloomy silence up the avenue, and waits while she knocks. As the key is turning in the lock he speaks for the first time.

“You say you will write to me to-morrow?” he says, moodily. “Will you keep your word?”

“Yes, I will keep it.”

“And after that when may I come and see you?”

“Never as long as you live. You will not want to come. Good-night, monsieur, and adieu!”

He sees her go in, then turns, springs into the cab, and drives to Mrs. Longworth's. His state of mind is desperate.

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He has feared, but he has hoped. He has had no thought of final rejection. And what is this talk of crime, and guilt, and wrong? The bare thought of such things in connection with her is sacrilege. Does she refer to Durand and his robbery? He does not care for that. But no, there is some other meaning—some molehill, no doubt, magnified into a mountain. And he must wait until to-morrow, until her note comes to clear up the mystery.

Mr. Dexter spends a supremely miserable and sleepless night. He goes to bed and flounders about, makes up his mind with a groan that sleep is impossible, gets up and paces to and fro in true melodramatic fashion. What will that note contain? What secret can she have to tell him? Will it turn out to be some foolish girl's trifle, or will it really be strong enough to hold them asunder? That, he decides to his own satisfaction, is utterly, wildly, absurdly impossible. This is soothing, and he returns, flings himself on his couch, and finally, as the gray dawn is breaking, falls asleep, and does not awake until breakfast time.

He finds Mrs. Longworth's numerous and select family assembled, absorbing the matutinal coffee and beefsteaks, and Mr. Beckwith lays down his knife and fork, and eyes the new-comer with stern displeasure.

“Mrs. Longworth, ma'am,” says Mr. Beckwith, “I believe this gentleman occupies the room immediately above mine. Either he is consigned to some other quarter of this mansion before another night falls, or blood will be spilled within these walls. Young man, may I inquire if you committed a murder last evening before you returned to this house? or what other ghastly deed preyed upon your conscience to the exclusion of slumber? That you should be a nuisance to yourself, is nothing—that you should be a nuisance to Mrs. Beckwith and myself, is everything. What, sir, did you mean by tramping up and down your apartment like an escaped candidate for a strait-jacket? Answer me that!”

"Very sorry," Frank mutters, rather ungraciously. "Didn't know I disturbed anybody. Couldn't sleep."

"No, sir, you couldn't sleep," retorts Mr. Beckwith, sternly. "What is more, you couldn't let Mrs. Beckwith sleep; what is still more, you couldn't let Mrs. Beckwith's husband sleep. If you have any regard for your carpets, Mrs. Longworth, you will request this young man to find some other establishment wherein to practice nocturnal gymnastics. If you have any regard for me, ma'am, you will administer to him a few bottles of Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup to-night before he retires. Look at him! Does not that lean and haggard visage bespeak a guilty conscience and a short allowance of sleep."

All eyes turn on Frank, who scowls and carves the steak as though he had got Mr. Beckwith on his plate, and were dissecting him. He certainly looks pale, as if he had had a bad night; and so too, does another member of the party, whom Mr. Beckwith is not quite so ready to handle. Longworth looks as though he had scarcely fared better in the matter of repose than his young kinsman, and he is the first to rise and leave the table.

"O'Sullivan back yet, Longworth?" is as far as Mr. Beckwith dare go with this gentleman; but there is a malicious twinkle in his eye as he asks the question. Is it not the talk of the town that Mlle. Reine Landelle has been turned out of her grandmother's house for abetting its robbery, that she has fled to New York, and that O'Sullivan, with his customary easy-going good-nature, has allowed himself to be imposed upon by her sham distress, and has gone with her? Further than this, scandal—even the scandal of a country town—goeth not. As Miss Hariott has said, Mr. O'Sullivan is one of these exceptional people who can do with impunity what would be the ruin of another.

"Just like him!" is the *Vehmgericht* of Baymouth; "a good-natured fool that any woman can twist round her finger."

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Longworth's negation is curt, and there is a look in his eyes as he faces Mr. Beckwith that makes that gentleman cough apologetically, and discreetly retire. He goes on his way, and the first person he encounters when he enters the office is Mr. O'Sullivan. It is in the editor's own room they meet, and Longworth turns for a moment of that same livid paleness of last night. The two men stand and confront each other, and in O'Sullivan's eyes the fiery light of indignation burns. He is not a handsome man—that you have been told—nor a dignified man ; but as he turns and confronts his chief, there is both manliness and dignity, beyond dispute, in his bearing. Longworth speaks.

" O'Sullivan," he says, " where is she ? "

" Maybe you'll tell me by what right you ask," O'Sullivan answers, contemptuously. " I know of none."

" By the right of a man who has wronged her beyond reparation, and yet whose only desire is to repair, as far as he may, that wrong. By the right of a man who has insulted the woman he should have protected and trusted through all things, and whose whole life will not be long enough to atone for that insult. I have been a fool, O'Sullivan——"

" Oh, upon me faith, ye have ! " interpolates O'Sullivan, bitterly.

" A scoundrel—anything you like. Nothing you can say can add to the remorse and shame I feel. I have not even a right to thank you for what you have done, but from my soul I do. Mine has been the doings of a dastard—yours of a true and honorable man."

He holds out his hand ; but O'Sullivan draws back, for the first time in his life, from the grasp of his friend.

" I have a word or two to say to ye, Mr. Longworth. When I have said it, it may be you will feel as little like friendly hand-shaking as I do now. You say well you have no right to thank me. I want none of your thanks ; I wouldn't lift a finger, at 'his minute, to save your life. You have for-

feited all rights you ever had so far as Reine Landelle is concerned; and it does me good to be able to tell you, this fine morning, that to your dying day you will never regain them."

Longworth sits down without a word, leans his elbows on his desk and his face in his hands.

"*You* talk of atonement," goes on O'Sullivan, contemptuously. "*You* talk of reparation! Upon my life, it's a mighty fine opinion you must have of yourself to think that whenever you choose you can make it up to her—that you have only to say a few flowery words and she will be ready to forget and forgive. If you think so it is little you know the same young lady. You're a proud man, Mr. Longworth, but you don't monopolize all the pride of the world; and the day you go to make your apologies, my word for it, you'll meet your match. It's a long score the same mademoiselle has to settle with you. You couldn't even tell her you were in love with her, because she wasn't in love with you. No, faith, such humiliation wouldn't suit your loftiness at all. You couldn't stoop to conquer, stooping wouldn't agree with a gentleman of so high a stomach. But you could ask her to marry you, because my lady Windsor set her flinty old heart on it. You took her when she said yes, because she dare not say no, satisfied you had nothing to do but make her fall in love with you at your leisure. And then this fine popinjay of a Frenchman comes on the carpet, with his superfine airs and graces, and because she knew him all her life, and was his sister in a way, and they have secrets between them that she won't betray, you lose your head, and make a fool, ay, and a rascal of yourself, with jealousy. On my word it's a thousand pities she didn't make a general confession to you of her whole life, seeing the fine way you took to win her confidence. And all the while any one not as blind as a bat, or a mole, could see it was the other one he was mad about, and poor Ma'amselle Reine—God help her between ye—only trying to keep the peace. Well, well, 'tis

idle talking. You have lost her and you deserve it, and I wouldn't wish my worst enemy a greater punishment. For if ever there was a heart, true and faithful, pure and good, that heart is Reine Landelle's."

O'Sullivan pauses, not for lack of indignant words, but for sheer want of breath. And still Longworth sits, his face hidden, and says nothing. What is there to say? He is hearing the truth, and it matters little if O'Sullivan's lips speak aloud the silent cry of conscience and despair. He listens, and feels no more inclined to resent what he listens to, than if some old, white-haired mother stood here in this man's place reproaching him. Only once he looks up and speaks, no anger, a touch of weary wonder alone in his tone.

"What! O'Sullivan!" he says. "Were you her lover too?"

"And if I had been," cries O'Sullivan, fiercely, "my word it's another sort of lover I'd have been than you. I'd have trusted the girl I was going to make my wife; I'd not have been the first to make out a case against her and hunt her down. Oh, faith! it's to a fine market you have driven your pigs, Mr. Longworth, and it's yourself is the lucky man all out this blessed morning!"

"O'Sullivan, let this end. I will listen to no more. You have a right to speak, but even your right has its limit. Will you tell me where she is?"

"You may take your oath I'll not!"

"She is safe and well, at least?"

"A good deal safer and better than you ever tried to make her, and that same's not saying much."

"Will you tell me how she is provided for? Come, O'Sullivan, try and be merciful. I have been her enemy, you her friend—you can afford to be generous. Where is she, and what is she going to do?"

Something of what Longworth feels and suffers is in his face and voice, and the O'Sullivan has an extremely tender heart.

He can imagine what it must be like to have won and lost Reine Landelle.

"She is in New York," he answers, grumblingly, but still conciliated. "She is with a friend of mine, and she is going to earn an honest living for herself. I promised to tell you nothing, and I have told you more than you have a right to know."

"Promised her?"

"Who else? It's little pity or pardon she has for you, let me tell you, or ever will. She will never forgive you until her dying day—those are her words, and much good may they do you."

Longworth rises as if goaded beyond all endurance, and begins striding up and down. O'Sullivan stands and watches him, grim satisfaction on every feature, and yet with a sort of reluctant compassion struggling through.

"It's more than you deserve," he says, still grumblingly, "and very likely it is little she'll thank me; but if you'll write a letter to her, I'll forward it. The greatest criminal, they say, ought to get a hearing."

"And have it returned unopened——"

"Oh!" says O'Sullivan, contemptuously turning away, "if you take that tone, I have no more to say. Faith! it's return it unopened she ought, and every letter you ever write to her, and unless I am mistaken in her, it is what she'll do."

"Stay, O'Sullivan—you are right. If it is returned unopened, as you say, it will be no more than I deserve. To-night you shall have it, and whatever the result——"

He does not finish the sentence, and so they part. O'Sullivan goes to his work prepared to meet and baffle the curiosity of Baymouth, with extremely short and unsatisfactory answers.

Longworth writes his letter, and finds it the most difficult of all the thousands he has ever written. It is long, it is eloquent; an impassioned prayer for pardon and reconcili-

ation—not at once, that is impossible—when time and parting shall have softened his offenses. If he had loved her less, he might well have been more generous, he tells her, he shows her his heart as he has never humbled himself to show it before. O'Sullivan's reproaches have not been in vain. His pride will never stand between them more. He is content to wait her own good time, he will not ask to see her, only he entreates her to let him write to her; total silence will be too bitter to bear.

He does not spare himself; he merits no grace, and owns it; he has deserved to lose her for ever; he can only acknowledge his sin, and crave pardon.

It is a relief to have written. Mr. O'Sullivan opens his rather small gray eyes as he takes the packet and weighs it in his hand.

"If ye have any stamps about ye, chief," he remarks, "I'll take them. I'm not a rich man and cannot afford to ruin myself entirely in postage."

He addresses the missive with a grim sense of the humor of the situation, and takes it to the post-office. As he enters he meets Frank Dexter hurrying out—a small, oblong letter in his hand, and a pale, intense expression on his face. O'Sullivan looks after him curiously.

"There is something wrong with that young man, and if I'm not greatly mistaken Mademoiselle Marie has a hand in the business. Upon my life there's no end to the trouble and vexation of mind these young women make. There's Longworth, as fine a fellow as ever drew the breath of life, but the moment he falls in love he loses every grain of rhyme and reason. Here is young Dexter, a fellow that was full of fun and rollicking good humor as an Irishman at a wake, and there he goes looking as if he had just been measured for his own tomb-stone. And here am I. Oh! may I never, if it isn't true that the less we have to do with them, the wiser, and better, and happier we'll be."

The oblong, perfumed, pale-pink letter is from Marie. Frank tears it open the moment he is out of the office, and reads this :

"I trust you, Mr. Dexter, chiefly because I cannot help myself, and a little because it is your right. I had hoped never to hear the words you spoke last night, but they have been spoken, and I must answer. I am not what you and every one here have thought me, I am not Mademoiselle Landelle—I am, and have been, for the past six months, the wife of Léonce Durand."

Frank is in the street ; people are passing, and they turn and look curiously at the young man who has come to a stand-still, staring at the letter he holds, with blanched face and horror in his eyes. For a moment he stands stunned, paralyzed by the blow he has been struck, unheeding the starers who pass him. Then some one—he never knows who—lays a hand on his arm and addresses him.

He shakes off the hand blindly, crushes the letter in his grasp, and hurries on.

"Léonce Durand's wife !" As the thought had once struck Longworth mute and desperate, so it strikes Frank now. Léonce Durand's wife ! the words echo in a dull sort of stupor through his mind. All the time he is hurrying forward, and when he stops he sees that he has left the busy streets behind him, and has reached a place where he can read alone and unobserved. He unfolds the letter again and finishes it.

"I married Léonce Durand on the day I quitted London, and came here concealing the fact, because I knew my grandmother would not admit within her doors a granddaughter who was the wife of a Frenchman. I have no excuse to make for that selfish and mercenary concealment—it has made Reine its victim, and now you. I liked you, and it pleased me to receive your attentions ; my own heart

was untouched, and—oh! let me own it, so that you may despise me as I deserve—I did not care whether you suffered or not. But I tell you the truth now, and lay myself at your mercy. I am sorrier than sorry; but what will that avail? I deserve no forgiveness, I can only hope that when you go away you will speedily forget one so unworthy as

"MARIE DURAND."

There are men who have stood up in the dock and listened to their death-sentence with far less agony of heart than Frank Dexter as he reads. The place is lonely; he flings himself down on the dry, brown October grass, his face on his arm, and so lies like a stone.

A long time passes. The afternoon deepens into amber twilight; this too grows gray, and darkness into night. The sky has lit its silver lamps long before he lifts his head, and rises slowly, feeling chilled and stiff. His face is haggard, his eyes red and inflamed. No one who knows Frank Dexter would recognize that face.

His first act is to tear the letter into minute fragments, and fling them from him; then he turns and walks back to the town. But in these hours the simple trust, and faith, and all that is best in his nature has left him—the boy's heart is gone, to return no more.

CHAPTER XXX.

"WITH EMPTIED ARMS AND TREASURE LOST."

N her warm, brightly lighted, favorite sitting-room, a little later, that same evening, Mrs. Windsor sits alone. It is the first time she has come down stairs since the robbery.

The shock to her nerves has been great, the overdose of

chloroform has injured her; she looks every day of her sixty-five years as she sits here.

Lying in her room alone, all the long, silent, lonely days, she has brooded over the base ingratitude and thorough badness of her younger granddaughter, until anger turns to positive hatred. And Mrs. Windsor is a thoroughly consistent woman—those she hates once, she hates always. Her likings are few, and in most cases slight; her dislikings are strong and deep, bitter and enduring. Sitting here, the face of a Sphinx could hardly look more cold, and hard, and gray. It lights up for a moment with the customary pleasure as Mr. Longworth enters.

"It is two whole days since you have been here," she says, "but I grow a very old woman, and must not exact attention. Sit down. Do you know that Marie has come?"

"Yes," he answers briefly, and understands that Marie has discreetly kept secret her visit to the office. Something in his face and tone, some subtle change, strikes her. She looks at him attentively.

"What is it, Laurence?" she asks. "Is it," she sits erect with sudden vindictive eagerness, "is it that that thief Durand has been taken?"

"I know nothing at all of Durand. I have heard nothing; it is of Reine I have heard—of Reine I have come to speak."

"I wish to hear nothing of her, not even her name. Of the two, if I had to choose between them, I would let the villain Durand escape, and punish her."

"Madam, you are unjust; we have both been unjust, and most cruel. Reine Landelle is innocent of all wrong, of all knowledge, or participation in this crime. No better, purer, nobler heart than hers beats to-day."

"Who has been telling you this?" she says, disdainfully. "What has become of your customary practical good sense, that you believe it? Have you then been really in love with

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this girl, that you are so eager to find and make excuses for her? I always doubted it—what was there you could see attractive in her?—but if you talk in this way, I shall begin to believe it."

"You may believe it. I have, and do love her with all my heart."

"And you believe her innocent?"

"Madam, I know her innocent."

"Who has been talking to you?" she repeats, leaning forward and transfixing him with one of her piercing glances. "What absurd invention has been made up for your benefit, that in the face of her own acknowledgment of guilt you hold her guiltless?"

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Windsor, there was no acknowledgment of guilt. She simply bore our insults and unmerited reproaches in silence. I will tell you what I believe, if you like."

"Durand was the gobber, doubtless. By some chance he may have heard from her that this money was in your room. The farmer says, you recollect, that Durand was standing with her at the gate as he passed through. In all innocence she may have told him; and Durand, in need of money, and knowing how easily the theft could be effected, instantly made up his mind to have it. She may have heard the noise of his entrance, stolen out and caught sight of him. But beyond this, I am ready to stake my life she knew nothing. And next day, when pitilessly accused, she had only to choose between silence and the betrayal of the brother she loved. She nobly chose silence——"

Mrs. Windsor's short, scornful laugh interrupts him.

"Brother!" she repeats, with infinite contempt. "I fear you have been worked too hard in your office, Laurence, during the absence of your assistant, and that softening of the brain is the consequence. Brother!" She laughs satirically again.

Longworth's face does not change ; he waits quietly for a moment, then resumes :

"She chose silence rather than betray the friend, the brother with whom her life had been spent, and whom in spite of misdeeds she loved——"

"Ah!" Mrs. Windsor says, with ever-increasing scorn. "Loved! now you draw near the truth."

"Loved," Longworth goes on, "but not as a lover—of that I have proof. From first to last she has been sinned against, not sinning. For you who never cared for her, who always distrusted her, some excuse may be found; for me who loved her, and while loving proved myself her worst enemy, there can be none. I will never forgive myself for my dastardly conduct to Reine Landelle to my dying day."

"Laurence Longworth, you are a fool!" exclaims Mrs. Windsor, exasperated for once out of all her cool *grande dame* manner. I know what all this means. The man O'Sullivan, the companion of that miserable girl's flight, has returned. *He* is a soft-hearted, soft-headed simpleton, and believes everything she tells him no doubt. He has talked to you, he has brought you a letter from her, a long and elaborate explanation, and you, in love by your own showing, and so with half your common sense gone, only too willing to be duped. Up to to-night I have always respected you as a man of exceptionally rational mind and unbiased judgment—I find you no better than Frank Dexter or any other moonstruck boy in love."

"I regret to lose your good opinion, madam, but if I must choose between its loss, and persisting in the greatest mistake of my life, then I have no alternative. I owe her this retraction. I must have been mad indeed when I could look into her truthful and innocent face and think her capable of guilt. Proofs of her innocence, of her rare and heroic nobility of character have been given me, proofs impossible to doubt; and for the future the aim of my life shall be to win,

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if I can, the forgiveness of the girl I have so grossly wronged."

He speaks with emotion. With every passing hour—with every review of the past, he is feeling more and more keenly how brutally he has acted, how blinded by passion he must have been. Mrs. Windsor listens to him, the gray, stony look making her stern face rigid, her lips closed in one tight, ominous line. She still sits silently staring at him for a moment after he has ceased—then she slowly speaks.

"Does all this mean, Mr. Longworth, that you intend to follow the girl and marry her?"

"There is no such hope for me, madam. If there were, the devotion of my whole life would be insufficient to atone. Through my own folly I have lost her forever."

"Bah! Keep your fine periods for the leaders of the *Phoenix*. I ask you a plain question—give me a plain answer: Do you mean to marry Reine Landelle?"

"Wherever and whenever she will do me that honor."

"In the face of her intimacy with the blackleg, gambler, robber, Durand?"

"Madam," Longworth says, with difficulty keeping his temper, "the intimacy, as you call it, was that of a sister who loves and screens a disreputable brother."

She laughs once more as she listens—a short, mirthless, most bitter laugh.

"And this is the man I thought wise with the wisdom of old age even in youth, the man I have trusted, and consulted, and loved as my own son. At one word from this girl he is ready to overlook all things and take her back. Surely this is besotted madness indeed."

Longworth rises.

"We had better part, madam," he says, quietly. "I have deserved to hear this from you, but the hearing is none the less unpleasant. I have told you we were both wrong, that she has been most cruelly treated from first to last, and that

my life shall be spent, so far as she will allow me, in reparation."

"One last word," she exclaims, rising and holding by the back of her chair. "Let us understand one another before we part. Am I to believe it is your fixed and unalterable determination to marry this girl?"

"It is my fixed and unalterable determination —"

"Wait one moment. I see you are impatient, but I will not detain you long. The will I spoke of to you some months ago still stands as it stood then. You are my heir—need I say that Reine Landelle and the man who marries her shall never possess a farthing of mine?"

Longworth bows haughtily

"Do me the justice, madam, to recall that on the occasion you speak of I declined your bounty. Permit me for myself and my future wife, if she ever so far forgives me to become my wife, once more and finally to decline it."

He moves decisively to the door. She still stands and watches him with drearily angry eyes.

"And this is the gratitude of man," she says half to herself. "I loved him almost as I once loved my own son, and see how he returns that love."

He turns instantly and comes back. He offers his hand, but she waves it away.

"For that love I thank you," he says; "for the trust and affection with which you have honored me, I am most grateful. But you must see that no alternative remains but to displease you. I have done your granddaughter a cruel wrong—if she were an utter stranger, much less the woman I love, it would be my duty to make atonement. I am sorry we must part ill friends, but if I have to choose between you, then I choose her."

"Go!" Mrs. Windsor cries. "I wish to hear no more. I have been a fool, and have received a fool's reward. If the day ever comes when wisdom returns to you, you may visit

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"Good-by, then," he says; "for it is forever!"

He takes one last glance, half kindly, half regretfully, around the pretty room; one last look at the stern, imperious, white-haired woman, whose life disappointment has embittered and soured, and then the door opens and closes, and he is gone.

"Misfortunes come not in single spies, but in battalions," he quotes, grimly, and then a hand is laid upon his arm, and he turns to see the pale, anxious face of Marie.

"Well?" she says under her breath.

"It was not at all well," he answers briefly; "she is implacable. How has she received you?"

"Coldly, but not so much more coldly than usual. You have told her—"

"That Reine is guiltless. Fear nothing; she does not suspect you, she does not dream we have met. She lays the blame of my changed convictions upon O'Sullivan. If you are careful, as I am sure you will be, my dismissal and disgrace may be of the utmost service to you eventually."

The touch of satire in his tone makes her wince. But she does not resent it. She speaks and looks humbled and shamefaced.

"What am I to do? I deserve your contempt—more than your contempt; but I think if you knew what I suffer, even you would spare me. I want to write to Reine, I have written—will you give me her address?"

"I do not know it. She is in New York, O'Sullivan tells me, safe and well, with friends of his. But her address he will not give—it is her own command. Give me your letter, and he will forward it."

She hands it to him, and stands looking so downcast and sorrowful that it touches him.

"Do not blame yourself too much," he says, kindly. "We

have all been wrong, but regrets are useless. To err is human, and we have all shown ourselves *very* human. To forgive is divine, and knowing your sister as I know her now, I have a conviction she will one day forgive us."

She lifts her eyes to his face, and he sees tears trembling in the gold brown beauty of their depths.

"Monsieur," she falters, "is there any sort of news of—him?"

"Durand? None, I am thankful to say. He is too clever a fellow to be caught. Make your mind easy, they will not find him."

"What a wretch you must think him," she says, covering her face, with a sort of sob; "and yet he is not. A gambler he may be—that is his besetting passion, but a thief—oh! no, no, no, he is not that. My going with Mrs. Dexter maddened him—he wanted to follow, to do perhaps some desperate deed, and in that desperation he entered and stole this money. It has been all my fault from first to last. How shall I answer to Heaven and to him for the sin I have done?"

"Don't cry," Longworth says, uneasily. He has all a man's nervous terror of a woman's tears, but he thinks better of Marie Durand in this hour than he has ever done before. "There is one thing I would like to say to you, if I may without paining you. It concerns Frank Dexter."

She shrinks at the name; pain and shame are in the face she averts from his searching eyes.

"It is this: Don't fool the poor boy any longer. You don't mean anything by it, of course, but it may be a sort of death to him. It is amazing the amount of harm a coquette can do a young fellow like Dexter, and without much meaning to hurt him either. Make him go; and to make him, I am afraid you must tell him——"

"I have told him," she interrupts, in a stifled voice.

"So!" Longworth says, and looks at her keenly. He

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sees it all. Frank has proposed, been rejected, and told the cruel truth. "Poor boy!" he says, rather bitterly; "he trusted you so implicitly, thought you hardly lower than the angels—it is hard lines for him."

He thinks of that evening in the boat, when he had opened his heart to him in one of his boyish outbursts, and he hardens to this selfish beauty before him, crying "idle tears" for the wrongs she cannot set right.

"They ought to hang coquettes!" he thinks, savagely. "Flirtation should be made a capital offense, punishable by a few years in the State Prison. Poor Frank! poor Durand! poor Reine!—if misery loves company there are enough of us, and that 'queen lily and rose in one' at the bottom of it all."

As he goes, a boy rings Mrs. Windsor's door-bell, and Catharine receives a note, which she takes to Miss Marie. She turns pale as she opens it. It is Frank Dexter's farewell.

"I have very little to say to you," he begins, abruptly—"nothing that you are not accustomed to hear, very likely, and care for very little. You tell me to forget you. I mean to try—it should not be hard to forget a woman without heart or conscience. You do not ask me to forgive you, and you do well—I will never do it. As to your secret, rest easy—it is quite safe. I leave here to-morrow; it will probably be a relief to you to know it; and in saying farewell, I also wish you and your husband all the happiness so well assorted a union cannot fail to bring.

"FRANK DEXTER."

While Marie in her own room is reaping the whirlwind she has sown, Mr. Longworth is on his way through the darkness to the house of Hester Hariott. He smokes as he goes—if he were ordered out for decapitation his last act would be to smoke on the scaffold. A cloud has rested between him and this friend of late ever since Reine's departure. She had faced him upon his first call at the cottage after that event, with flushed cheeks and flashing eyes, and tempestuously demanded if this shameful story were true.

"What story?" Longworth had asked, wearily throwing himself into a chair. He knew there would be a scene, and shrank from it impatiently.

"This horrible, this cruel story that Reine Landelle has had to run away, her only friend in the world that poor little O'Sullivan, and you—you, Laurence, chief among her accusers."

He tries to explain—tries to defend himself. She listens, the angry color deepening in her face, the angry light shining in her eyes.

"And this is Laurence Longworth!" she exclaims; "this man who hunts down a defenseless girl, whose two worst crimes are that she has promised to marry him, and that she is too brave to defend herself at the expense of another! this man who takes sides with a heartless old woman, knowing her to be merciless as only one woman can be to another, whose years and gray hairs have brought her neither charity toward God nor man! Oh! shame, shame! I refused to believe it—I would not believe it; and now, out of your own mouth you stand condemned!"

He tries to speak, pale, troubled, every word stabbing him, but she will not listen.

"You could look in her face and doubt her—that ~~me~~, brave, innocent child's face. You could know her nearly six months, and believe her capable of treachery and crime. Oh! man, shame upon you! I tell you that if my own eyes saw, my own ears heard, I would not believe their evidence, if she told me they deceived me. If Reine is false, then there is no truth left on earth. Only the night she fled—driven away homeless, friendless, penniless, by you and that woman—she came here to me, all her misery in her despairing face, poor, poor child! all her heart-break in her beautiful eyes, and talked to me of her old home in France, and the brother she loved—full of faults to others but always dear to her. She had not touched food all day, she was

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fainting with fasting, and we sat together in that room, and she took something before she went away. If I had only known, do you think she would have gone—do you think I would have let her go? Or if her disgrace and misery were too great to be borne here, do you think I would not have gone with her? Your Mr. O'Sullivan is a true friend and a gallant gentleman, and when he returns, my first act will be to go to your office and thank him. For you, I am your friend no more—I want to see you here no more. I will never believe again that there is honor or common sense left in mortal man."

"What!" Longworth says with rather a dreary smile, "not even in O'Sullivan?" He rises as he says it and takes his hat. "We have been good friends for many years, Miss Hester, but I never liked you so well as I do to-night. I may have been wrong—Heaven knows—passion and jealousy may have blinded me as you say, but I thought I was right. If I have made a mistake, then Heaven help me, for I have ruined and lost forever the happiness of my whole life."

And so he goes, and Hester Hariott lays her head on her arm and cries impetuous, sorrowful tears for the friends she has lost.

They have not met since, and now he is on his way to tell her that she was right, he wrong.

Candace admits him. Yes, her missis is at home, and he enters without ceremony the familiar room. Miss Hariott is singing, but not very cheerfully, and he catches the words she sings:

"Thro' dark and dearth, thro' fire and frost,
With emptied arms and treasure lost,
I bless Thee while my days go on."

"With emptied arms and treasure lost." Could more fitting words greet him? She rises, looking surprised, trying to look displeased, but failing.

"Hester," he says, "I have come back in the character of the prodigal, erring but penitent. I have come to own I have been a fool—the greatest fool that ever drew breath—to tell you Reine Landelle is all you have thought her, and more—noble, brave, true, loving, and loyal unto death."

"I knew it!" Miss Hariott cries, joyfully. "Mr O'Sullivan is back, and she has proved her truth. Thank Heaven for that! And she will forgive you, and all will be well?"

She catches his hand—it is quite evident she at least finds it easy to forgive him—and stands looking at him with eager eyes.

"O'Sullivan is back, and her truth is forever beyond a shadow of doubt," he answers. "But forgiven—no, I am not that, and in all likelihood never will be."

"Nonsense!" cries Miss Hariott, energetically; "don't I know the girl. I tell you she could not cherish enmity if she tried, and then she——"

"Liked you far too well," is on the tip of her tongue, but she bites that unruly member, and stops short.

"She is very proud, you would say," he supplements calmly. "Yes, and that pride has received a mortal wound. A far less spirited girl might find forgiveness here."

"Tell me all about it," says Miss Hariott, drawing a chair close, and looking at him delightedly. "Where is she, and what does she say? Tell me all Mr. O'Sullivan told you."

"Rather a difficult and disagreeable task," he answers, smiling slightly. "I have grown used to extremely plain speaking within the last twelve hours. There is no epithet in Mr. O'Sullivan's vocabulary too hard to apply to me. Reine is well, he tells me; is in New York with friends of his, who will be good to her, and intends to earn her own living henceforth—by teaching, I suppose. Of Durand of course she knows nothing. Her address O'Sullivan will not give; and—that is all there is to tell."

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She looks at him searchingly.

"All. If you wish to write to her, your letters must go *via* the O'Sullivan. I think she will be glad to hear from you."

"You have written, Laurence?"

"Could I do less? I have a letter from her sister, to be given to O'Sullivan, at this moment in my pocket."

"Ah! you have been at the Stone House?"

"Just come direct from there."

"And Madam Windsor?"

"Refuses to listen to a word. Mrs. Windsor is without exception the best hater I know."

"And Marie—what says she to all this?"

Again her keen eyes look at him searchingly, but Longworth's face wears its most impassive expression.

"She says very little—she appears to feel a great deal. I like her better under a cloud than I ever did in the sunshine."

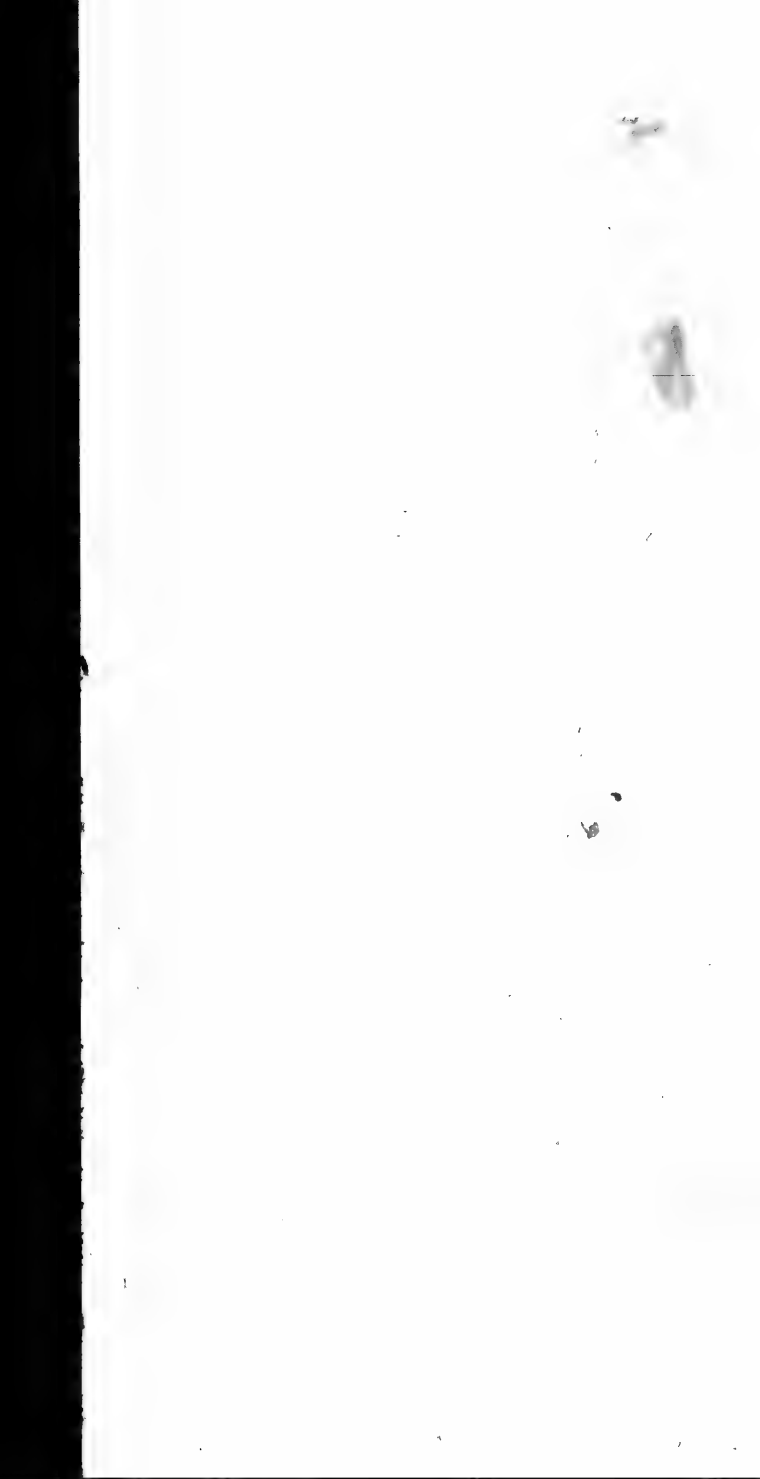
"And she will live with that woman after the shameful manner——"

"Ah, Miss Hariott, as you are strong be merciful—in hitting Mrs. Windsor you also knock me over, remember. What is Marie to do? It is her only home. She is a lily of the field, neither able to toil nor spin; she will only add to her sister's wretchedness if she permits herself to be cast off. She must kiss that great lady's hand, and be thankful for the crumbs that fall from her table."

Miss Hariott impulsively opens her mouth, thinks better of it, and gulps down some very strong words. After all, what right has she to cry out because the world is unjust and selfish, and the innocent suffers for the guilty? It is the universal law of the world, and she is not strong enough to set the wrong right.

She has been unjust in her own way, too; she has thought some very hard and bitter things of this friend before her,





forgetting that while she saw with the clear, calm, far-sighted eyes of friendship, he looked with the blind vision of love. She has misjudged him, for he has suffered, does suffer—she can read it in his face, although in that face to casual eyes there is but little change.

"Larry," she says, caressingly, and lays her hand on his arm, "I hope you will not let yourself feel this too deeply. 'Time at last makes all things even,' you know, and this, like more of life's mistakes, is but a question of time and patience. I suppose there is no loss that has not its compensating gain; your gain in this is so thorough a knowledge of Reine's goodness that to doubt her a second time will be impossible. You know her as she is, pure and true, ready to brave more than death to serve those she loves, ready to perish rather than break her word. You will think better of all women for her sake—you will be a better and truer man yourself for the pain and loss of to-day."

But Longworth does not answer. He rises, looking cold and pale, and turns abruptly from her. There are some wounds so keenly sensitive that the touch of a feather makes the whole body wince.

His good-night is brief and curt, and he goes home slowly through the dark, melancholy night.

Where is she? he wonders. What is she doing alone in that great city? Her image rises before him as he saw her that day in Hester Hariott's garden—a girl in gray, with scarlet breast-knots, eloquent face, and flashing eyes, vowing to hate him her whole life long. He recalls how half-admiring, wholly amused, he stood and fell in love with her, and registered a vow on his own part to change that hatred, if man could do it. Time and destiny had aided him, and in the very dawning of the love he sought he had thrust it from him with insult and scorn. In the past many experiences have been his, but it is reserved for this night to teach him what real remorse and despair mean.

CHAPTER XXXI.

DURAND.



IFE has its *entr'acts* as well as any other drama, when the drop-curtain is down, the play for the time over, and nothing is left but to sit blankly and wait. This time between the acts in Laurence Longworth's life has come now. The performance had been romantic—out of the common order of his life entirely, giving a rose-tint to the dull drab of every-day; but it has closed more abruptly than it began, and life, and duty, and routine go on without it. Days pass and weeks, weeks are strung into months, the *Phoenix* is issued as usual, bed-time comes, and meal-time, and sleep is sweet, and food is welcome, although love has spread his golden wings and flown forever.

The nine days' wonder has died out, other interesting scandals have come to replace it. Frank Dexter has gone off and *not* asked Marie Landelle to marry him. Her sister's disgrace has been too deep even for a silly boy like Dexter to overlook. Old Mr. Longworth is a very proud man; he has threatened to disinherit him if he does not give her up. And Frank has given her up. Any one can see how it is preying upon her—she has been growing thin and pale ever since he went away, she accepts no invitations, goes nowhere, except to that strong-minded old maid's, Miss Hariott, and is losing half her beauty.

For Longworth—well there is an escape if you like! Think of his having been actually engaged to the girl, and on the very brink of ruin and disgrace for life. No wonder that somber look is growing habitual to him, no wonder he

sits silent and moody in the midst of the boarders, no wonder that swift flash leaps into his eyes, or that scowl darkens his face at the remotest allusion to the unlucky affair.

Mrs. Sheldon watches him silently and wistfully, with exultation in her heart, and sham sympathy in her eyes. He sees neither. The coolest courtesy, decency will permit is in his manner, when it is impossible to ignore her altogether. In some way he vaguely feels she is rejoicing in Reine's downfall, and something very like aversion rises within him when they meet.

Christmas and New Year go by drearily enough, the end of January comes. Mr. O'Sullivan has spent the holidays in New York with his friend Mrs. Murphy, and makes life temporarily bright for Reine by taking her and her stout friend everywhere. He has forgiven his chief—he is much too generous to bear ill-will, and the anxious, questioning look of Longworth's eyes, when he returns, gives him a twinge of something very like compassion.

"Is there any answer, O, or any message?" Longworth asks, a sudden eager flush rising in his face.

And the answer comes slowly.

"Not a word, chief. She's well, and has your letter. But sure, -I think——"

"Ah! never mind that, O'Sullivan," Longworth says, wearily, turning away and resuming work.

"I wouldn't be too despondent, my boy, if I were you," cries O'Sullivan, cheerily; "go on as you've begun; sure 'tis only fair to court her before you marry her, and upon my honor and conscience, it was mighty queer courting ye did when ye had her. We have a saying at home, 'that patience and perseverance made a bishop of his reverence.' They're not the virtues you'll be canonized for, I think myself, but a little practice of them will do ye a deal of good. If these proofs you're working at are ready, I'll take them, chief."

And so he goes; and so it is always; and Longworth sits

with something like despair in his eyes, and a horribly sickening feeling at his heart. He has written to her, not once, but many times, long and impassioned appeals, laying his whole heart, its love, its longing, its repentance, its ceaseless self-reproach—bare before her. But she has only answered once that pleading cry for pardon, then in words brief and calm, that fall chill on the fire of his feelings.

"I read your letters," she begins; "what more is there to say? You plead for forgiveness—that I answer at all shows that in heart at least you are forgiven. You say you love me—loved me from the first. Pardon me if I find this very hard to believe. Where love is, trust is, they are twin sisters, they are never apart. That love is love no longer when it doubts. I never professed much for you, but I would have trusted you—yes, monsieur, let circumstances have been twice as strongly against you, I would have believed your word against all the world. Do not press for answers to your letters. I will not write again, no, not once. For the rest—to let you come to me, to be your wife—think of it no more. We were never suited to each other—I would not make you happy; and for me, I would think of the past always and tremble. Out of my heart, monsieur, I forgive you, but to return to you, to marry you—never!"

Surely silence is better than a letter like this, so Longworth thinks as he first reads it, with compressed lips and paling face. But reading it again, and still again, new hope dawns in the darkness.

"Yet I will say what friends may say,
Or only a thought stronger;"

and in its very coldness the "thought stronger" is there. She has cared for him—indirectly—she owned that, and owned it for the first time; his letters were received and read, and—new hope dawned. He would be patient, he would wait, he would plead, and his day would come. Nothing in life goes

on forever, his probation would end, and Reine be restored. How often Mr. Longworth read that letter, how and where it was treasured becomes us not to tell. Anything more prosaic and unromantic than a newspaper editor, the heart of man hath not conceived; but under the influence of the tender passion, that befools all, even he may sometimes swerve from the straight path of practical common sense and be pardoned.

And is it not written that, "To say the truth, reason and love keep little company nowadays. The more the pity that some kind neighbor will not make them friends!"

February comes, sleety and rainy, in wintry winds and New England snow-storms, and brings with it the first break in the blank. It comes in the shape of a letter from Frank Dexter.

"If it be within the range of possibilities," writes Mr. Dexter, "come down at once. In point of fact, whether it be possible or impossible, you *must* come. The dear old governor is very ill—general break-up of everything—and he calls for you. Come immediately, for he cannot hold out more than two or three weeks at most."

In the twilight of a wild March day Longworth reads this, and as he reads there rises before him a vision of the long-gone past. The snow-shrouded, wind-blown streets vanish, and in their place comes back the sunny, sensuous southern landscape, the songs of the negroes at work in the fields, the vine-wreathed, tree-shaded old house, and the grim-browed, imperious, stormy old master, the uncle ever generous and kind to him. What an ungrateful young blockhead he has shown himself in that past time, what a debt of gratitude he owed that old man, if for nothing else than that he had bought off Mrs. Longworth, and saved him from the moral shipwreck of being her daughter's husband.

He departs next morning, and reaches the old homestead late in the afternoon of a genial spring-like day. As he rides

up the long sweep of drive he recalls vividly his last visit, when spent with fatigue, and pale with passion, he had stridden into his uncle's presence, to defy him, and bid him forever farewell. What a lifetime he seems to have lived through between then and now.

Frank comes out to meet him, and Longworth gives a quick, keen, half-anxious look into his face. But there is not much change—a trifle worn and thin he looks, perhaps, the boyish brightness gone from eye and cheek, the gravity that untroubled years would not have brought around his mouth—no more.

"Am I in time?" Longworth asks.

"In time, and that is all," Frank responds; "the doctor does not give him twenty-four hours. His one dread has been that he might go without seeing you."

Five minutes later and Longworth is in the sick-room, sitting by the bedside, holding the trembling old hand in his. Mrs. Dexter has tried to "prepare" the dying man, but he has half-started up with a shrill cry.

"Laurence! Laurence! Come back at last! He said he never would come! Go, bring him here. Why do you delay? I want no preparation to meet my boy."

And now he lies, holding him fast, the dull old eyes trying to read the face so long unseen, the face of "his boy,"—familiar, yet so strange.

"Changed, changed, changed," he murmurs. "Nothing but change as we grow old. He was only a boy then, bright-eyed and smooth-faced, and he left me because I would not let him marry a wax doll without heart or head. And I loved him—ay, I loved him as my own son."

"Forgive me," Longworth says, brokenly. "I have longed to come back many a time and say these words, but——"

"Your pride stood in your way! You couldn't humiliate yourself to ask an old man's pardon; and then young Dex-

ter was here, and I might have thought you had returned for the sake of the inheritance! But I never cared for young Dexter, though I've dealt fairly by the lad—a good lad too and not overstocked with brains. But I wanted you back, Laurence—oh! I wanted you back, and I told Chapman to write that letter, and you wouldn't come. Well, well, well! it's all over now, and I have forgiven you, and you are here at last. And you didn't marry the little Sheldon, my boy, after all—how was that?"

"My dear uncle, I owe you many debts of gratitude, but there is not one of them all I feel so deeply as *that*. You were my earthly salvation in those mad days of my youth and besotted folly."

"Ah! you can own it now. And what is this other story Ellen tells me of a little French girl? Well—you don't like it, I see—only take care, take care. Oh, my boy, my boy, it is good to look on your face again!"

He keeps him by his side through the long hours; he falls asleep, clasping his hand, at last.

"Stay with me, Larry," he says, "it will not be for long now. And it is such a weary while—oh! such a weary while since you sat by my side before. All these years I've wanted you, and forgiven you, and longed for you, but you were proud and wouldn't come. Young Dexter never could fill your place, though I've dealt fairly by the lad—no one shall ever say other than that."

He drops asleep, still clasping "his boy's" hand, and through the long hours of that last night Longworth sits beside him, silent and sad, watching the feeble flicker of life die out. He is a very old man, and death is coming gently as the slumber of a child. Frank shares his watch, sometimes sitting opposite, sometimes roaming restlessly but noiselessly up and down. And just as the day is breaking the old man opens his eyes from that long stupor-like sleep, and gazes wildly around.

"I dreamed Laurence was here—my boy Laurence!" he cries out, and Longworth bends above him.

"I am here, sir—it was no dream. Do you not know me?"

A smile of recognition lights up the old face.

"My boy, my boy!" he says. "I knew you would come back at last."

He never speaks again. He relapses into that dull torpor, and Longworth, fatigued with travel and watching, is half asleep in his chair, when Frank, struck by something in his uncle's face, stops short in his walk and stoops over him. In another moment his hand is on Longworth's shoulder, his face very pale.

"Wake, Larry," he says, "I am going to call my mother. You can do nothing more here—he is gone."

The twilight of a fair March day, Longworth and Dexter, both in mourning, pace together up and down the long veranda, both very grave and silent. James Longworth is lying in the churchyard beyond, and only an hour ago James Longworth's will was read. He died a richer man than either of his nephews dreamed, and has shared those riches equally between them, each division an ample fortune in itself.

The two young men walk up and down in silence, while the stars come out and darkness falls. Longworth is the first to speak.

"I shall be off to-morrow," he says. "Suppose you come with me. You look rather seedy, dear boy, as if you needed a trip somewhere, and there is no need of your staying mooning here. The *mater* can manage the place without you——"

"I am going for a trip," Frank responds, rather moodily, "but not to Baymouth. *That's* the last spot in the universe I ever want to see. I wish to heaven I had never seen it!

I am going abroad again—for years, this time—and I don't see that you can do better than do the same. It is ten years since you crossed the ocean, and there is nothing to detain you, now. Throw the *Phoenix* to the dogs—to O'Sullivan, rather—and let us be off."

"Impossible," Longworth says. "My life has but one motive now, to find and be forgiven by Reine Landelle. But you, dear boy, it is the very time for you to start by all means, the sooner the better. Accompany me to New York to-morrow, and I will see you off."

So it is settled, and much to his mother's dismay, Frank departs with his cousin on the first stage of his very long journey. Three days after they reach New York, they shake hands, and part on the deck of a Cunarder, and Dexter has gone.

Mr. Longworth lingers on, hunts up a few old friends, and spends the long spring days pretty much wandering about the streets. Surely, if he linger long enough, sooner or later he will meet Reine—people in a city are like cards in the same pack, sure to come together some time, in the universal shuffle. But a week, two weeks pass, and still he watches and hopes in vain.

And so, restless and aimless, it chances one night (if anything ever does befall by chance) that he finds himself with an acquaintance, who likes to see life in all its phases, in a faro bank. It is late, and the rooms are well filled. They are loitering about among the players, when suddenly a voice, low, bland, *trâinante*, singularly familiar, and musically foreign accented, falls on Longworth's ear.

"Monsieur would imply, then, that he has been cheated? Pardon, if I misapprehend, but that is what monsieur has insinuated, is it not?"

"I insinuate nothing!" shouts a furious voice; "I say that you have been cheating monsieur, from the first minute we sat down, and I appeal to these gentlemen if——"

He does not finish the sentence. His opponent has a glass of wine at his elbow, and he flings it crash in the face of the infuriated speaker.

Both men leap to their feet. There is a confused sound of many voices and hurrying of feet. Then there is a flash, a report, a cry, and Longworth springs forward in time to catch Durand as he falls.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"AFTER LONG GRIEF AND PAIN."

TWO hours later, on that same march night, Mr. Miles O'Sullivan sits busily and virtuously at work upon a slashing diatribe, meant for that most contumacious of men, the editor of the Baymouth *Herald*. As he sits, one of the office-boys enters hastily—a yellow envelope in his hand.

"Telegram for you, sir, from New York."

Mr. O'Sullivan drops his pen hastily, and seizes the missive. In all New York City there is but one person for this gentleman, and surely she— He tears it open, and draws a long breath of relief; it has nothing to do with Reine.

"Come here at once—do not lose a moment—matter of life and death.
LAURENCE LONGWORTH."

O'Sullivan sits for a moment stupidly staring at the words. So Longworth is in New York! and what does this mysterious message mean? Has any harm befallen the chief? Has he seen Reine, or has he met Durand? "Matter of life and death!" What does it mean?

"Boy's waiting, sir. Any answer?"

The brisk question rouses him.

"Answer?" he repeats. "Yes, wait a minute." He

dashes off two or three words. "All right; will be there," and hands it to the messenger, who departs.

The sub-editor winds up his caustic remarks in a sudden hurry, and goes home. This dispatch has upset him—it upsets him the whole night long, and he is glad when to-morrow comes, to jump on board the earliest train and be off. It is late in the evening, and quite dark when he reaches the city and whirls up to Longworth's hotel, and Longworth himself is the first person he sees, standing at one of the open windows smoking.

"What is it?" O'Sullivan asks, breathlessly. "Who is it that's dead or dying, and why have you sent for me?"

In a dozen words Longworth tells him.

"It's Durand—shot in a gambling hell, and dying here. He is calling for Reine, and it is to fetch her to him I have sent for you."

"The Lord be praised!" says Mr. O'Sullivan, drawing a long breath of relief; "I thought it was worse."

"It can't be much worse for poor Durand. He won't live the night out—so the doctors say. You had best be off, O'Sullivan, if he is to meet Reine alive. I'll keep out of sight if she likes, so *that* need not detain her."

"I am much mistaken if it would in any case. With Durand dying, it's little she'll think of any one else. Poor fellow! and so a shot in a gambling brawl is the end of him! But doesn't he want to send for the other one at all—Miss Marie?"

"No," Longworth responds, briefly; "I asked him. Reine runs no risk in coming to see him—Marie does. For Heaven's sake, O'Sullivan, be off—every moment is of value."

The cab is still waiting. O'Sullivan jumps in, gives the order, and is rattled off. In fifteen minutes he is standing, hat in hand, before the startled eyes of Mrs. M. Murphy.

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I wasn't dreamin' of ye last night, Mr. O'Sullivan. An' sure here ye are an' my dream's come in. It's only this blessed minute I was saying to mamzelle——"

"Where is she?" O'Sullivan asks. "I must see her at once."

"And it's no good news ye're bringing her in such a hurry I'm thinking. She's there in the parlor beyond trimming a cap, and faix it's herself has the elegant taste all out in that same trimming."

O'Sullivan hurries by, and taps at the parlor door.

"Enter," says a sweet and familiar voice, and with his heart beating beyond its wont he obeys.

She lifts her face—the sweetest on earth, he thinks, and rises with a smile of glad welcome.

"I knew your knock, monsieur," she says, and holds out a little dusk hand. Then she pauses, the smile dies away, for there is no answering smile on his face. "What is it?" she asks, quickly. "Marie——"

"Your sister is well, mademoiselle, but I—I don't bring you very good news for all that. I don't know how to break things——"

"It is Léonce!" she says. "Oh, monsieur, speak out! It is Léonce!"

"Yes, mademoiselle, it is M. Durand. I am sorry to tell you he has met with an accident, and is—is dangerously ill in fact, and is asking for you——"

He breaks off in distress. She has turned suddenly sick and faint, and sits down, her face all blanched with terror.

"He is dying, monsieur, and you are afraid to tell me!" Then she starts to her feet. "Take me to him," she cries out. "Oh, my brother! my brother!"

"The carriage is at the door," he answers; "but won't you put on a hat, a bonnet—something——"

"Oh! I had forgotten. Yes, yes, wait one moment."

She hurries out of the room, and is back directly in hat

and jacket. She finds Mr. O'Sullivan in the store, explaining as far as need be, this sudden abduction to Mrs. Murphy.

"Ah, then, the Lord pity her! As if she hadn't enough to trouble her without that. But doesn't all the world know it never rains but it pours!"

Reine appears, very pale, and with a certain intense expression in her dilated eyes. Mr. O'Sullivan in profound and sympathetic silence, hands her into the cab, and they are driven rapidly through the busy, brightly gas-lit streets.

"Tell me about it," she says, after a little; "how was it? What was the accident?"

He hesitates.

"Oh, speak!" she says; "do not be afraid. It seems to me I can bear anything now. He is to die, you say?" her voice breaks in a sob; "nothing can alter that?"

"Well, then, mademoiselle, he was—shot!"

There is a momentary sound of horror, then stillness.

"By whom?" she asks, in a stifled voice.

"I do not know—I never asked. It was an accident, very likely—such things happen. Longworth chanced to be there, and——"

He stops—his tongue has betrayed him. Reine turns suddenly, and looks at him.

"Longworth!" she repeats; "what of M. Longworth?"

"Mademoiselle, excuse me. I did not mean to speak of him, but the truth is, Longworth is in New York, and chanced to be on the ground at the time of the—accident, and it is in his care Monsieur Durand is at present. 'Twas he sent for me—Durand was asking for you, and Longworth didn't know your address. You needn't see him if you wish——"

He pauses, for the cab has stopped at the hotel. He leads her in, and upstairs into a private parlor.

"Sit down," he says, "and wait one minute. I must see if—"

Again he breaks off. An inner door has suddenly opened and Longworth stands on the threshold. He backs a step at the sight of the two before him—growing very pale.

"I beg your pardon," his eyes are on Reine. "I did not know—"

"Take me to him," she says, unheeding his words; "take me to Léonce. Oh monsieur, surely I am not too late!"

"No," Longworth answers, sadness, compassion, tenderness in face and voice, "you are not too late. Only—he is sinking; it is best you should know, and you must be very quiet."

"I will be anything—only take me to him."

"This way, then."

She follows him into the inner room. A door stands ajar—she catches the glimmer of a faint light, of a bed, of a dark head lying motionless on the pillow. Then she hurries past Longworth, and in a moment is kneeling beside the bed, kissing again and again the shapely white hand lying limp and lifeless on the counterpane.

"My dear one! my dear one!" she says with a great smothered sob, and the dark eyes open, and a smile dawns on the cold, white, beautiful face of the dying man.

"*Mignonne!—ma âme*," he whispers, "I knew you would come."

Longworth waits for no more. He sees her draw the weak head within her arms, close to her heart—then he shuts the door and leaves them together.

"But Léonce, brother beloved, there should be a clergyman if indeed, as they tell me, you are dying—"

"They tell you truly, *ma Petite*, my hour has come. A desperate death is closing a desperate life. As to M. le Curé, he has been here—the excellent M. Longworth has

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forgotten nothing. And it is of M. Longworth I would speak to you, *m'amour*. As through me you have been parted, let it be through me, even on my death-bed, that you shall come together. For I have seen his heart, and he loves you, Reiné, and you—ah! you shrink, but remember the dying have privileges, and then there is atonement!—always there is atonement.

His voice is weak, and breaks, and ceases. His breathing is labored, but in his dark eyes there shines the light of an invincible determination to say what he has to say, in spite of death itself.

"Answer, Petite," he says; "he loves you and you need him. You will forgive and take him back, will you not?"

"Léonce, do not ask me. Forgive him—oh! yes, out of my very heart; but take him back—no, that can never be."

"And why not? Because you have said so? But a rash promise is better broken than kept. It is your pride that says no, Petite, while your heart says yes. Will you not try at least—for my sake?"

"What is there I would not do for your sake? Oh! brother, best beloved, are we indeed to part like this!"

She breaks down in passionate sobbing for a moment, but at the look of distress on his face, stills herself with a choking effort.

"And Marie?" she whispers, "should she not be here? Think of her, Léonce. Her heart will break when she hears of this."

A faint smile of scorn and pain together flashes across his white face.

"Then why let her hear it, Petite? Such horrors are not for those delicate ears. You tell me to think of her, *chérie*; the great misfortune of my life has been that I have thought of her too much. As to her heart breaking, and for me!—Ah! well, you are an angel with an angel's heart, and so for your sake, in this last hour, I will say nothing. But she

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should not be here—no, a thousand times! I wronged her when I married her—I will not wrong her still further by robbing her of her fortune, that fortune for which she would stake and lose a hundred worthless wretches like me. And she is very right—who should know that better than I? Only we will not talk of her, my little one. Oh! my little one—brave, and loving, and loyal, who would risk a kingdom and crown, I believe, to come to her worthless brother!"

The weak voice, faltering and broken throughout, breaks off altogether, and there is silence, long and sad. The slow moments go by and range themselves into hours, Durand dozes fitfully, and Reine's head droops mournfully against the side of the bed, as she watches him. In all the vast city, she wonders, is there another wreck so great, so utter, so pitiful as this? Every good gift that Heaven has given him—youth, strength, beauty, talent, life itself, cast recklessly from him—and this is the end!

The doctor has promised to look in through the night, and keeps his word. Reine, cold, and still, and mournful, watches him with dreary, wistful eyes, but in his face she reads no hope. He goes out and speaks to O'Sullivan—watching uneasily in the outer room.

"The end will come before morning, and there is a chance of his dying hard. You had better get that poor young lady in there—his sister, I presume—to retire. It will never do to let her be with him at the last."

Mr. O'Sullivan goes on this second unpleasant errand, and finds it harder to perform than the first. The dark, sad eyes look up at him imploringly.

"Ah! monsieur, do not send me away. I cannot leave him. You have so good a heart, monsieur, pray, pray do not ask me to go."

"But if you wear yourself out to-night, mademoiselle, you will be unfit for nurse duty to-morrow. And then the doctor

—it is his order, mademoiselle—there are examinations, you know, and—and all that, and indeed I think you had better lie down for a little. You need have no fear of trusting him with us."

She rises slowly and reluctantly.

"If indeed the doctor orders it—But, monsieur, you will call me—promise me that. If there is a change I must be with him—*then*."

O'Sullivan promises, is ready to promise anything, and leads her away. She is shown to a room ordered for her, and as the door closes, kneels down by the bedside and buries her face in her hands, and the sobs she has stifled in the sick-room break forth. Presently this too exhausts itself, and worn, and most miserable, she drops asleep there where she kneels.

She awakes cramped and cold, to find that it is broad day. As she rises slowly and painfully, her door opens, and Miss Hariott hurries in and clasps her in her arms.

"Little Queen! Little Queen!" she exclaims, "I have found you at last, and this time I will *never* let you go!"

"But I must," Reine says, in sudden terror. "I must go to Léonce. Oh! why did I sleep! Tell me—you look as if you knew—is he—better?"

There is silence, earnest and pitiful, then a desolate wailing cry. For Hester Hariott's tear-wet eyes and averted face tell the story, and Reine knows that Durand is dead.

It is Mr. O'Sullivan who carries the news to Baymouth, to the dead man's widow. Mr. O'Sullivan grumbles a little at finding himself, willy nilly, mixed up with this extremely unpleasant family tangle, and at having the thankless task of "breaking things" to young ladies forced upon him whether or no. But Reine has asked him, and what is there this unromantic little man, with the brogue and the bald spot, would not do for Reine?

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It is two or three days before an opportunity offers, for he does not venture to call at the Stone House lest he should arouse the angry curiosity of its mistress. But one evening as he takes his postprandial stroll in meditative mood, he comes unexpectedly upon the young lady herself. She approaches him at once and with eagerness.

"I have been watching for you," she says. "I knew you were in the habit of walking here. Mr. O'Sullivan, you have but recently came from New York. Tell me of Reine."

"She is well," he briefly answers.

"Why has Miss Hariott gone so hastily? She left a note telling me she had gone to Reine who was in trouble, but telling me no more. Monsieur, you are my sister's friend—what is that trouble?"

His eyes shift away uneasily from hers—with the stick he carries he traces figures confusedly on the sand. There is a pause.

"You tell me Reine is well?" Marie says, growing very pale.

"Yes, mademoiselle, well in health, but as Miss Hariott told you—in trouble."

"Ah!" she says, and catches her breath; "it is then Léonce?"

"Mademoiselle, yes, I am sorry to say, her trouble concerns M. Durand."

She lays her hand over her heart, and stands silently waiting, growing more and more pale. And then—how, he never knows—he is stammering out the truth, that Durand has been shot, and is dead and buried. He is horribly frightened as he speaks; she stands in dead silence looking at him, as if slowly turning to stone. Then—as he ceases speaking—she turns, still without a word, as if to go. She walks a dozen steps, and then without warning or cry, falls face downward on the sand.

It is no more than Mr. O'Sullivan has expected. He lifts her up, carries her farther down, and dashes cold sea-water in her face. Presently, as he is beginning to grow anxious, she revives, opens her eyes, sits up and pushes back the wet fair hair off her forehead.

"What is it?" she asks, incoherently. "Oh! I know," a look of anguish crossing her face. "Léonce is dead—my love, my husband! Oh! *Mon Dieu!*"

She covers her face with her hands, and sits motionless for a moment, then the old look of resolution comes into her eyes, and she rises. But she does not shed a tear. She holds out her hand to O'Sullivan, standing anxious and distressed.

"You are goodness itself, monsieur, good to my sister, good to me. I thank you with all my heart."

She returns and hurries away. O'Sullivan follows her, but there is neither faint, nor falter, nor pause this time as she hastens on her way to the Stone House. Straight into the presence of Mrs. Windsor, and on her knees before her Marie tells the whole story of her own deception and her sister's innocence.

"I loved him and denied him. I loved her and spoiled her whole life. My husband, made reckless by me, stole your money, and that theft and his tragical death are all my doing. From first to last I have deceived you, but the truth is spoken at last, and when you publish my shame and guilt to the world and turn me from your door, I will only be receiving the reward I have richly deserved."

Mrs. Windsor listens with a bitterness that is like the bitterness of death. Always the same—deception, dishonor, trickery. Is there to be no end to the disgrace brought upon her by these girls? Has not the name of Windsor been dragged through the mire sufficiently, that this fresh degradation is to be added. Longworth has forsaken her; she is growing feeble and old; must this girl go, too, and all the world know why?

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"Leave me," she says, in a stifled voice, "and come again to-night. Who knows of this last, worst shame?"

"Mr. O'Sullivan."

"Ah! And Mr. Longworth is, I presume, with your sister in New York?"

"He is."

"Go!" Mrs. Windsor says, with sudden, swift, suppressed fury. The sight of the girl is hateful to her. In her heart she could curse them all.

For hours after, she sits stonily dumb, staring in a blind, blank fashion into the dying fire. And this then is the end of all! In her life she has had many good things—beauty and grace, a wealthy husband, an old name, a stately house, a fair daughter, a noble son. Death and time have robbed her of all save the wealth, and to whom is that to go? Longworth refuses and repudiates it; by this time the granddaughter she hates may be his wife. And now there is this last dishonor—is it, too, to be given to the derision of the world? No, Marie shall stay. It is the only reparation she can make. In spite of all her deception, her grandmother feels for her none of that intense abhorrence she has for the other. It is settled—Marie shall stay.

In New York Reine, in the tender care of Miss Hariott, droops and falls under this last blow. He has been so inexpressibly dear to her, this erring, brilliant brother; his death has been so awfully sudden and tragic that it crushes her. Sleep deserts her, or if it comes fitfully, is broken by haunted, terrible dreams. She grows apathetic to all things; nothing moves or interests her. Longworth, inexpressibly troubled, comes and goes, but she takes no heed of him. No effort of Miss Hariott's can arouse her. As the weeks go by, her health fails, and she grows pallid and thin as a shadow. Thoroughly alarmed, Mr. Longworth and Miss Hariott hold a consultation at last, and when the lady returns from it to her charge, she makes an abrupt proposal.

"Little Queen, suppose we go on a journey?"

The dark, languid eyes lift wearily, and look at her.

"My last year's scamper over Europe has but whetted my appetite for more," continues Miss Hariott, briskly; "I pine to go again. Suppose we start—we two—next week, and we will go to Rouen, and you will show me the white house on the hill—Ah! I thought that would bring you back to life!"

For Reine has started up, with clasped hands, and eyes that light for the first time in many weary weeks.

"We will go next week," says Miss Hariott, with decision. "We will reach London early in May, in time for the height of the season, and we will ride in a 'broosh and four,' as Thackeray has it, in Hyde Park, and see the queen and royal family, not to speak of the nobility and landed gentry. I have a conviction, Petite, that if I had been born an English woman I would have been a horrid snob, and adored the aristocracy. Then we will cross to France and spend a month, if we feel like it, in a certain picturesque Norman city, and my darling will get back her old brightness, and be my high-spirited, radiant 'Little Queen' of other days."

It is nothing less than a direct inspiration—Reine rouses from that hour. Next week comes, and they go. Longworth sees them off, and though she does not heed it then, Reine remembers afterward how pale and wistful his face is, as he holds out his hand and quietly says good-by.

They have a delightful passage, and before it is over Reine "suffers a sea change," and is quite her old self again. They see London at its best and gayest, as Miss Hariott has predicted, remain a fortnight, and then cross the channel. Through the whole month of June they linger in Paris and Rouen. Other faces are in the "old house on the hill" now, as Reine, silent and a little sad, wanders through, or plucks an apricot ripening against the garden wall. The morbid apathy has gone, but in its place a profound thoughtfulness

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comes, that puzzles her companion. She contracts a habit of sitting and gazing earnestly at her friend—that excites the curiosity of that excellent lady.

One rainy evening, the last of their stay in the quaint old town, they sit alone together. Twilight fills the room. Miss Hariott at the window gazes out at the slanting lines of rain, at the city all blotted out in a white blur of mist. Reine, half-buried in a big chair near, holds a book, but she does not read—she is watching the elder lady with that intent look that has often been fixed upon her of late.

"Well, my dear, what is it?" says Miss Hariott, coolly. "Silent curiosity has its limits. It seems to me you have quite a new way of staring at me lately. Now, what is it about?"

"Miss Hariott," returned Reine, earnestly, "are you rich?"

"H'm! That, my child, is what legal gentlemen term a leading question. Why do you ask?"

"Because I want to know."

"An excellent reason. Well, you see," says Miss Hariott, folding her hands in an argumentative manner over her belt, "riches are comparative. In regard to the rag-pickers and street gamins I see every day in the street, I am rich. In regard to the Rothschilds, or Miss Burdett Coutts, or your grandmother Windsor, I am poor."

"That is not what I mean, and you know it. You told me once you had an income barely sufficient to live upon, and that last year's tour exhausted your finances. How, then, have they been replenished? How, in short, have you been able to come again, and fetch me, and live luxuriously, as we have lived? How?"

She leans a little forward in her earnestness, as she asks the question. Miss Hariott laughs softly.

"Sooner or later I knew it would come to this. I told him so! My dear, can you not guess?"

Reine falls suddenly back.—The dim light hides her face, and she does not speak a word. Miss Hariott bends toward her, and puts her arm caressingly over her shoulders.

"Little Queen, do not be angry—it was our only hope. Could we see you droop and die before our eyes? To bring our little Norman girl to her old home was her one chance, and—he made me do it. He loves you so dearly, Petite, so dearly——"

But Reine puts up her hands with a little impassioned gesture.

"Oh! do not!" she says; "it is then to Mr. Longworth I owe it all!"

"All. To send you away was the greatest sacrifice he could make and he made it. He is not a patient man as a rule, but, Little Queen, he has been very patient here——"

She breaks off, for again the girl makes a gesture to stay her. It is evidently a subject to be discussed by no third person, however privileged. There is a pause, and the elder lady peers out of the window against which the rain is dashing in wild drifts.

"A real summer tempest," she says, in a changed tone. "We will have a disagreeable day to-morrow to start for Italy."

"We are not going to Italy," says a voice from the depth of the chair; "we are going back to England."

"My dear——"

"And by the first ship from Liverpool we are to return to New York. Let us say no more about it."

"But, Reine, one word—you are not angry?"

"I am not angry. I am tired though, and if you will excuse me, will say good-night."

She kisses her friend and goes, and Miss Hariott is left sitting by the window, perplexed and anxious, and profoundly ignorant whether she has not given the death-blow to Laurence Longworth's last hope.

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They return to England. Three days they spend in Liverpool, then they are homeward bound on the wide Atlantic once more. Not one word is spoken on the subject broached on that night in Rouen, and Reine's face and manner tell nothing. She is simply quiet and thoughtful, but sweet and bright, and perfectly restored to health; and Miss Hariott, looking at her, feels that no matter how Longworth's love affair may go, she at least has not labored in vain.

They land in New York, and both take it as a matter of course that Mr. Longworth should be the one to meet them. They drive to a hotel together, and after the first ten minutes of preliminary greeting Miss Hariott starts up, declares she is perishing for a private cup of tea in her room, and is gone in a flash.

"Now or never," she thinks, as she marches down a long corridor; "if they cannot come to an understanding *now* I wash my hands of them forever!"

Mr. Longworth at least is making the attempt. He has borne Miss Hariott's brief presence with impatience, and the instant she goes is standing by Reine holding both her hands, and gazing down at her, all his heart in his eyes.

"Reine," he says, "am I forgiven?"

"Out of my heart, monsieur. Ah! how good you have been—I know all, and thank you. Ah! how I thank you. And Léonce—I promised him. I have been very passionate and proud, but how could I remember anything against the friend who had been so good to my brother!"

"And this is all!" Longworth says, and drops her hands, and walks away to the window, stung to the heart.

There is a pause—a moment of wistful indecision. Then she crosses over, lifts his hand to her lips, and kisses it as a token of wifely love and submission.

"And Laurence, because I love you so well I can never let you go."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A FOREGONE CONCLUSION.

AND so Longworth and Reine are married ! " exclaims the "gentle reader," looking up. "Well, we knew they would be. And now tell us what the bride wore, and how she looked, and who were the bridesmaids, and how *they* looked, and who 'stood up' with the bridegroom, and where they went, and all about it."

There is not much to tell. It was the simplest of weddings, and the bride wore white, of course, but only white Swiss, and the traditional orange wreath and veil, and looked lovely. And the only bridesmaid was Miss Hariott, and she looked stately and handsome, and very happy. As to the bridegroom—but who ever is interested in the bridegroom? Mr. O'Sullivan was not best man—who was, does not matter. Why he was not signifies nothing either. There was the *Phoenix*—it was impossible to be absent so often from the post of duty.

There was a wedding breakfast, and then they went to Quebec, a city where there are always zephyrs and breezes (for it was warm weather in New York that August), and where the thermometer never mounts up among the nineties, and saw the Thousand Isles and Montmorenci, and the Plains of Abraham, and Wolfe's grave, and were happy!

Miss Hariott went home, and said nothing about it, and perhaps that was the most wonderful thing of all. So quietly was it kept, that in all Baymouth only two people knew it, and one of these two was Miles O'Sullivan, from whom wild horses, or yet thumbscrews could not have torn it.

And it fell out, some six weeks later, that Miss Hariott

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Miss Harriott

gave a party. And a select company of the cream of the cream of Baymouth were bidden and came, for this lady, despite her æsthetic tendencies, was a very queen of hostesses. And the little rooms were well filled, and Miss Marie Landelle, in trailing black silk and jet ornaments, looked fair as a star, and white as a lily, and cold as Anderson's delusive Ice Maiden. And Mr. Frank Dexter, newly arrived from "doing" Europe for the second time, bronzed and mustached, much improved and quieted by foreign travel, looking tall and handsome, and rather superb, was there, but he held aloof it was noticed from Miss Landelle the whole evening.

He had outgrown that old folly, Baymouth said; the disgrace of her sister and cousin—by the by, *was* he her cousin?—still clung to her. How singularly that sister had vanished! said more than one Baymouthian—for all the world as if the earth had opened and swallowed her. Still, Mr. Miles O'Sullivan might have told tales, no doubt, if he chose; and as for Mr. Longworth—and here ladies turned, with a smile, to their hostess—where *was* Mr. Longworth, and now that he was a millionaire, was he ever coming to Baymouth again?

Miss Harriott, in sweeping silks that became her well, scarlet flowers in her profuse dark hair, smiled as she listened, a quizzical and rather puzzling smile. Oh, yes, Mr. Longworth was coming back—she expected him here to-night, in fact. Did not she know? Why, he arrived this evening from Canada by train. It was partly to welcome him, and that he might be greeted by many familiar faces, she had invited her friends on this occasion.

A slight sensation went through the rooms at this unexpected announcement, and a faint, amused smile passed over the face of Marie Landelle as she listened.

Among the changes these months had wrought, one of the most notable was that which had made this young lady an in-

mate of Miss Hariott's home, and a pensioner of Miss Hariott's bounty. For, one July night, some three weeks before, that great and gracious lady, Mrs. Windsor, had closed her eyes upon all things earthly, and had gone forth from the Stone House in gloomy and gorgeous state, to return no more.

Two days later and the reading of the will electrified all Baymouth. The Stone House, liberally endowed, was left to the town, to be used as a Home for Aged Women; there was a legacy to each of her servants, and the remainder, an enormous fortune, to a distant cousin, a merchant of Boston. Neither of her granddaughters was so much as named in it, nor her friend, Mr. Longworth, and it bore date but a fortnight before her death.

It was a will that perhaps might have been contested by the lawful heiresses, but one of these young persons had disappeared from mortal ken, and the other felt little disposition to dispute it. She had battled in vain, her efforts to secure this fortune had brought nothing but misery upon them all—it was retribution, and she bowed her head and accepted her fate. Miss Hariott offered her a home, and to Miss Hariott she went. Other homes might have been hers, were proffered indeed—but that was impossible. It was about this time Mr. Frank Dexter returned from foreign parts, his tour of many years resolving itself into precisely five months. That hearing of Durand's death from Longworth's letters, he should go straight to Baymouth, that being in Baymouth he should, of course, visit Miss Hariott, goes without saying. He met Marie seldom, alone never, but still they did meet, and if the young lady was silent, and shrinking, and a little cold, all that was natural, and—Durand was dead, and he could wait.

Mrs. Laura Sheldon, large, milk-white, blonde-haired, sweetly smiling, came late—after Miss Hariott's announcement—and so did not hear it. Next to Mlle. Landelle, she was the prettiest woman there. She could wear green, and

wore it—pale-green silk, with quantities of tulle, pink roses, and green grasses in hair and corsage. She was late, but not the latest; half an hour after, there was a momentary stir and thrill that ran like electricity from room to room, and turning round to discover the cause, she found herself face to face with Laurence Longworth. For six months she had not seen him. With a little exclamation, so glad that it was not to be repressed, she turned to him, her eyes kindling, her cheeks glowing, and held out her hand.

"Oh, Laurence! what a surprise this is! How glad I am to see you again! I began to think you had deserted us forever."

"Would you have minded much?" he said, laughing. "So Miss Hariott has not told you either."

"Told me what?"

He laughed again. How well he was looking, Mrs. Sheldon thought—how handsome, how happy!

"It was not thus in other days we met;
Hath time and absence taught thee to forget."

"Reine Landelle," she might have quoted.

Once again, she thought, as she had so often thought before, how had it ever been possible for her to refuse this man? And in addition to all, he was now a millionaire, though to do this charming young widow justice, she would have gone with him to beggary.

"Miss Hariott's taste for private theatricals will never be outgrown. I fancied every one knew all about me and my affairs. I find I come among you, and startle you as much as if I were the marble guest. Ah! here is our fair hostess now—that modern marvel—a woman who can keep a secret!"

"And who never indulges in second-hand cynicisms! Mrs. Sheldon—you are old acquaintances, I know—but in her

new character, let me present you to Mrs. Laurence Longworth."

It is the *coup de théâtre*—whether prepared with malice prepense, who shall say? And turning round Laura Sheldon sees a vision! A bride-like figure in trained white silk, and delicate laces, and two dark upraised eyes she has never thought to see again. It is Reine Landelle. Nay, Reine Longworth surely, for Longworth stands beside her, and looks at her as men only look upon what is the apple of their eye, and the delight of their life. It is Laurence Longworth's wife!

Something of what she feels perhaps is in her face, and those sweet dark eyes read it. All small animosities fall to the ground, and Reine holds out her hand.

"I shall be very glad if my husband's cousin will count me among her friends," she says, simply. And then she drops Miss Hariott's arm, and takes her husband's, and turns away.

One last glimpse.

An interior. Gas jets, softly shaded, pouring their subdued light over Miss Hariott's parlor. Mr. Longworth lying luxuriously back in his traditional chair, Miss Hariott near him. Miss Hariott talks, Mr. Longworth listens. Mrs. Longworth sits at the piano, and plays an exquisite song, without words, faint and sweet as the silvery ripple of a summer brook. Her husband's eyes are upon her, while his ears are at the disposal of his hostess.

"So the heir came yesterday," continues Miss Hariott, "and sold the Windsor Mills. He got a fabulous price for them. And that is the end of the Windsors."

"Take her for all in all," quotes Longworth, "we shall not look upon her like again."

"And once *you* were the heir, Larry. Only think of the moral courage you had—to resign a fortune of five or six millions!"

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A FOREGONE CONCLUSION.

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"And all for me," says his wife, suddenly rising, and standing behind his chair—"Laurent, mon ami, it was all for me, was it not? I wonder if I was worth it?"

Mr. Longworth glances up with eyes of lazy adoration.

"All for you, my darling, and I think you were worth it. I don't know what the market value of a Little Queen may be, but I should say her price was above rubies."

A pause—uncomfortable for Miss Hariott, who feels that she is playing "gooseberry." Madame Longworth comes to the rescue.

"Sing for us, *Marraine*," she says, caressingly; "I have not heard you once since we came, and it is a night for song and music."

A garden scene. A night like a great crystal, full of limpid moonlight, soft winds, and sparkling stars. A lovely lady sits in a garden-chair, wrapped in a fleecy white shawl, her perfect face upturned to the radiant night sky. Near her stands a gentleman, and to him not a star in all those golden clusters is half so fair as that upraised face. They are silent, listening to the music from within.

"I never knew your sister was beautiful until last night," says Frank Dexter, "though I admired her always. Happiness is an excellent cosmetic. As she once said herself of love, 'it is the very best thing in all the world.' You remember that day, Marie?"

"I remember," she answers, softly.

And then there is silence again. Nothing has been said, nothing has been done, but they are friends, these two; and though there is much to be mourned for in the past, one does not mourn forever, and one can hope so much for a beautiful widow of twenty-one. So, Frank Dexter, standing here to-night beside Marie Durand, does not despair, though his day may be yet afar off. Listening to the song that comes through

A FOREGONE CONCLUSION.

the open window, he knows that all life holds for him in present or future is in the words Hester Hariott sings :

"And I know that at last my message
Has passed through the Golden Gate,
So my heart is no longer restless,
And I am content to wait."

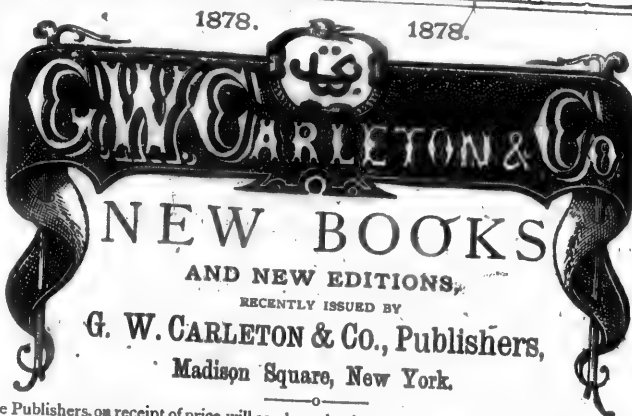
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